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ACROSS ICELAND
THE LAND OF FROST AND FIRE

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ACROSS ICELAND

THE LAND OF FROST AND FIRE

By OLIVE MURRAY CHAPMAN

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

FORTY-SIX IN BLACK AND WHITE FROM

THE AUTHOR'S WATER-COLOUR DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS AND A SKETCH MAP

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TO
EINAR JÓNSSON
As a token of the Author's admiration
for his work

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FOREWORD

THIS book, which I venture to offer to the public, is an attempt to show, among other things, something of the modern conditions in Iceland, and of the big advance towards civilization that has taken place in that country during the last twenty-five years.

During a journey of many hundreds of miles—mostly on ponies, as there are very few roads—from the south of Iceland, round Snæfellsnes and across to the north-east, I was given shelter at nights by the kindly occupants of the various isolated little farms that I passed on my route. I thus had the opportunity of making friends with the people, whom I found very hospitable and often wonderfully cultured.

If I am able to interest my readers in this romantic land on the fringe of the Arctic Circle, still so comparatively unknown and unvisited, and which contains such an amazing variety of scenery, and so many dramatic and surprising contrasts, I shall feel amply rewarded.

My thanks are due to Mr. Einar Jónsson, the sculptor, for permission to reproduce the photographs of his work, which I am asked to state are strictly copyright. I am also indebted to Mr. John H. Reynolds for advice with regard to the table of pronunciation and the spelling of Icelandic names, and to Mr. T. W. Kendrick, of the Department of British and Mediæval Antiquities, British Museum, for some valuable suggestions.

OLIVE MURRAY CHAPMAN.

May, 1930.

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(By permission of Mr. Einar Jónsson)

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ACROSS ICELAND
THE LAND OF FROST AND FIRE

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ACROSS ICELAND

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY AND NATURAL FEATURES

IN one respect Iceland is certainly unique among European countries, for—never having had a primitive and savage race—it contains no prehistoric remains. The first colonists were wise and high-born chieftains who brought from their mother country, Norway, an already advanced civilization. But before their arrival in the ninth century, there are believed to have been some even earlier settlers who called the country Thule, and who are said to have been Christian Irish monks, for when the first pagan Norwegian settlers took possession of the island they found books, bells and croziers left behind by the monks, who fled at the Vikings' approach. These people were called "Papar," an Irish name meaning priest, by the Norsemen, and there are a few places in the south-east of Iceland, such as

Papafjördur, Papey and Papaós, whose names bear witness to these early Christian settlers from Britain.

It was in 864 that Gardar, a Swedish Viking, in attempting to reach the Hebrides, was driven from his course by one of the wild gales that so often sweep the North Atlantic, and accidentally reached Iceland. He explored the coast, and on his return to Norway was very enthusiastic about his voyage and discovery. Inspired by the experience of Gardar, Floki the Raven, another famous Viking, also determined to visit this wonderful new country. It is said that, in order to find the way, he let loose three ravens, one at a time, in mid-ocean. The first flew back to Norway, the second returned to the ship, but the third flew ahead and did not return. Floki accordingly sailed in the direction in which the third raven had disappeared, and it brought him to the west coast of Iceland, where he landed, and from a hill-top he looked down upon a fjord filled with ice. The scene was cold and bleak in the extreme, and he thereupon decided to name the new country Island, or Land of Ice, and Iceland it has remained to this day; although the title is most undeserved, for, with the exception of the glaciers and mountain tops, there is no ice nor snow in Iceland during the summer months and the

climate is often no colder than the north of Scotland. In fact, like many Arctic countries, it can be very warm on some occasions, but, on the other hand, bitter winds that blow from time to time straight from the North Pole make one feel that the name is, perhaps, not so inappropriate after all! I experienced one such wind on June 23, and I needed all my warmest clothes; even a leather coat proved poor protection.

Commanding a noble position over the harbour at Reykjavík is a fine and inspiring full-length statue of a Viking warrior. It is the work of Einar Jónsson, the great Icelandic sculptor, and is in memory of Ingólf Arnarson who, in 874, became the first permanent Norwegian settler in Iceland. Two years previously Harold Fairhair, after the battle of Hafrsfjord, had become sole King of Norway and had imposed taxation upon its chieftains who had hitherto been free. Rather than submit to the new ruler, they preferred to emigrate; and so for sixty years onward the Vikings, men of the finest and noblest blood of Norway, following the example of Ingólf Arnarson, landed on Icelandic shores. Each chieftain ruled his own district. These districts were called Land-takes (Landnám) and the records and genealogies of many of these early settlers have been preserved to this day. Iceland has there-

fore a full account of her beginning, more so than any other nation. The early pagan chieftains were at the same time priests, for we read that they presided at the sacred feasts of the Temple.

In 930 the first Icelandic Parliament, the Althing, was established in the now historic plain of Thingvellir. It was held in the open air and was a meeting of all the godar and freeholders, but its powers were exercised by a body within this assembly—the Lögrjetta, or Legislative Council. The general director of proceedings was called the Law Speaker, and it was his duty to proclaim the new laws to the people from the Lögberg (Law Mount), a ridge of rocks overlooking the plain. The Law Speaker was elected by the Lögrjetta for a period of three years, and during that time he was required to repeat in public the entire code of laws. Law suits were also cited at the Lögberg, which was, in fact, the official place for public announcements as well as the centre of the parliamentary activities.

From 930 onwards for nearly four centuries Iceland was a proud and independent republic, making her own laws, the only republic in existence in Europe at that early stage of history.

The Althing met every year about the end of June, the people coming from all over the country

to attend this open-air parliament, and camping for the two weeks of its duration all about the valley and along the banks of the Öxará, the whole place being studded with tents. Many of the prominent law-givers and chieftains made themselves booths under the shelter of the rocks, and the remains of some can still be seen to-day, although only two of them date from the saga period. These booths must have been quite warm and comfortable, for they were built of turf and stone, and covered with vadmál or homespun.

In 1000 the most momentous and historic of all the great debates took place at the Althing, for a decision was to be made as to whether or not Christianity should be adopted as the religion of the country. A few years previously King Ólaf Tryggvason of Norway had sent Christian missionaries to Iceland, and in 999 Gizur the White and Hjalti Skeggjason, both converts to Christianity, went to Norway, and on their return succeeded in introducing a resolution at the Althing that the new religion should be adopted. It is easy to picture the dramatic scene with the vast crowd, assembled on the plain, listening intently to the orators who were speaking from the rocks above.

The matter was being considered and fiery

speeches were in progress on both sides, when general consternation was caused by a messenger who came running with the alarming news that, from the Ölfusá, a boiling stream of lava was overflowing the homesteads. The opposition were quick to seize the opportunity, pointing out to the people that undoubtedly this was a sign of the anger of the gods ! For a few moments things looked black indeed, until Snorri, a pagan priest who favoured the resolution, with a ready wit pointed to the great pile of lava rocks on which he was standing and cried with a loud voice : “ At what then were the gods wroth when *this* lava was molten and ran over the spot on which we stand ? ” The people had no answer, for it was only too true that time and again there had been flows of molten lava from the numerous volcanoes of the country.

It was finally decided that the great decision should be left to Thorgeir, a pagan lawgiver of great wisdom. It took him long to decide. But at last, after meditating for three days and three nights in his booth with a sheepskin flung over his head to shut out the light, he proclaimed from the Lögberg that in future the people of Iceland should worship the White Christ. Furthermore, he declared that they should be baptized and the temples be pulled down, but those who cared to

sacrifice privately in their own homes were at liberty to do so. The following law was passed :

“ This is the beginning of our laws : that all men shall be Christian here in this land and believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; but leave off all idol worship, nor expose children to perish, and not eat horse-flesh. It shall be outlawry if such things are proved openly against any man ; but if these things are done by stealth, it shall be blameless.”

Later on, through the interference of King Ólaf the Saint, this last ignoble clause was eradicated.

At first the Icelanders were very loath to be baptized. They disliked cold water intensely, but eventually the difficulty was overcome by the practical suggestion that they should retire to the nearest hot springs, where the water was warm and comfortable ! This they accordingly did, the hot springs at Laugarvatn and other places being conveniently used as fonts. Thus for the only time in a nation's history did Christianity become adopted by law, peacefully, without a single drop of blood being shed.

Now followed the greatest period in Icelandic history. Six Benedictine and five Augustine monasteries were founded, and many of the fine old Icelandic gems of literature are said to have been written or copied in these centres of learning

in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the rest of Europe was practically bare of literature.

The Icelandic poets and historians, creators of the sagas, have justly earned immortal fame. Ari Fródi, one of the fathers of Icelandic history, was born in 1067. He was responsible, with others, for that remarkable work, the "Landnámabók," in which is faithfully recorded the names and homes of all the early settlers. Frederick Howell describes it, and rightly so, as a "veritable Domesday Book."

The greatest of all Icelandic historians, however, was Snorri Sturluson. Born in 1178, he certainly ranks high among the world's geniuses.

In his immortal work, the "Heimskringla," we have not only a complete history, wonderful in its dramatic conception, of the kings of Norway from earliest times, to the fall of Eysteinn in 1177, but the author writes also of his own and other foreign lands.

Snorri has been compared to the famous Greek historians for his wonderful sense of drama, and his appreciation of dramatic situations.

His home was at Reykholt, and here he was assassinated by order of the King of Norway in 1241.

His bathing place, "Snorri's Bath," may still be seen here. It is circular in form, built of stones

and cement, and has a stone bench all around. Snorri arranged for it to be supplied with hot water from one of the adjacent hot springs, for one of his greatest joys was the luxury of a hot bath !

He was in the habit of taking it in the company of his friends, and, after the habit of the ancient Romans, they would discuss politics, history and the important questions of the day.

Other saga writers have written about the colonization of Greenland by the Icelanders in 986, and also of the discovery of "Vinland" (America) in 1000 by Leif, son of Eirík the Red.

An interesting account of the discovery of Greenland is given by Ari Fródi in his work "Íslendingabók." He says :

"The land which is called Greenland was discovered and colonized from Iceland. Eirík the Red, a man from Breidafjörð, went thither, and took land in a place called Eiríksfjörð. He gave the land a name, and called it Greenland, saying that it would entice people to go there, if the country had a fine name.

They found human dwelling places both east and west in the land, remnants of boats, and stone implements, from which they could judge that the same people had wandered about there which inhabit Vinland and which the Greenlanders call Skrælings. But he began to colonize the country fourteen or fifteen winters before Christianity was introduced to Iceland, according to what was told

Thorkell Gellison in Greenland by one who had accompanied Eirik thither."

Of single saga tales there are countless numbers, including many of great literary merit.

One of the most famous is "Burnt Njáll." The story tells of the tragic fate of the wise and heroic chieftain, Njáll, who, together with his wife and children, perished in the fire, when his home was burnt to the ground by his enemies at Bergthórshvoll in the south of Iceland, near Thórs Mörk.

Other favourites are "Grettir the Strong," the "Ere Dwellers" and the "Laxdale Saga."

To quote from Frederick Howell * :

"The Sagas are the Sybilline books of Scandinavia, the historical and geographical treatises of the North, the 'Debrett' of the Icelander and the story-books of his children. They cover the whole realm of literature from theology to ghost stories, from philosophy to fairy tales. Little marvel that they were read till the leaves wore down, patched and mended, and copied and multiplied as no other books ever were, save the Scriptures themselves. In a word, they were the books of a nation, and not of a class."

In 1262 the gallant little Icelandic Republic was destined, through the dissensions and intrigues of her own chieftains, to come under the rule of

* "Icelandic Pictures," by Frederick W. W. Howell, F.R.G.S.

Norway and, although the people still made their own laws and met as usual at the Althing, their national life began to deteriorate. To quote from Howell :

“ With the freedom passed the fruits of an heroic age. The curb upon the chieftain checked the skáld (poet), copying took the place of writing, and then the land began to live upon the memories of the past.”

There now followed a sad period in the nation's history. In 1380 Iceland, together with Norway, came under Danish rule, and in 1402 an appalling epidemic of Black Death destroyed two-thirds of the population.

In 1550 the Catholic Party was overthrown, and the Lutheran form of religion took its place and has continued to this day. With the Reformation the country was stirred to new life ; there was also a revival of letters. Hallgrímur Pjetursson, the great religious poet, was born in 1614. His famous Passion Hymns, which had such an immense effect upon the people at the time, are still sung every evening during Lent in many Icelandic farm-houses.

But Iceland's troubles were not at an end. In 1707 smallpox claimed ten thousand victims. This calamity was followed by a terrible famine

fifty years later. The poor little nation reached the depths of its misfortunes, however, in 1783. The awful volcanic eruptions of that year destroyed hundreds of people, and countless horses and sheep, besides laying waste large tracts of land; and many families emigrated to Canada. But in spite of all these severe trials, the spirit of Iceland was never broken, and in 1811, with the advent of Jón Sigurdsson, the great statesman and patriot, a new era dawned. Meanwhile, the Althing had been held in 1798 for the last time in the open air at Thingvellir, where it had met without one break since 930, when it was first formed. Its restoration took place at the capital, Reykjavík, in 1843, where it has met ever since.

In 1874, largely through the labours and influence of Jón Sigurdsson, Iceland, at the celebration of her one thousandth anniversary, received from the King of Denmark her own constitution and practical freedom. This was followed up, in 1904, by Home Rule. From then onward she has gone steadily ahead, and on December 1st, 1918, Iceland became an independent kingdom in unison with Denmark, whose King she shares.

The last twenty-five years have witnessed almost unbelievable changes in the national growth and civilization of the country. A telegraphic cable has been established to Europe, a university has

been founded, as well as the Icelandic Steamship Company. A certain number of roads have been laid, and an excellent telephone service has linked up many of the outlying farms and fishing ports.

Although Iceland is considerably larger than Ireland, its entire population has never exceeded a hundred thousand, and could easily be compressed into one crowded London street! This scarcity of numbers is largely due to the fact that nine-tenths of the island is uninhabitable, being a vast desert of rugged lava, poured forth in ages past from its many volcanoes and intersected with mountains and great glaciers.

A railway has never been constructed, and until recent years there were practically no roads of any description, except in the immediate vicinity of Reykjavík; but latterly some of the isolated farms and villages around certain parts of the coast have been linked up by a road of sorts, and more are frequently being laid, although many of these are at present little better than cart-tracks. A few of the larger rivers are bridged, but many of the smaller ones have to be forded and all long journeys across country must be made on ponies, for that is the only means of travelling both in the interior and around most parts of the coast where roads are either nil, or impossible for a car.

The coast of Iceland is wild, rugged and much indented by large bays, fjords and small inlets. The island lies in the North Atlantic, between two and three hundred miles south-east of Greenland, and the extreme north comes just within the Arctic Circle. Polar bears are occasionally seen here during the spring, having drifted ashore on moving ice-floes, but they seldom if ever are allowed to wander far inland. Although the distance from Greenland is comparatively short, the difference in climate is great, for a branch of the Gulf Stream, which flows up the south coast and northwards along the west coast of Iceland, does much to counteract the polar currents and to soften the climate. The country is therefore, as has already been stated, not so cold as the name suggests; although, as may be expected from its geographical position, the weather is very changeable, especially in the north, where the temperature is considerably lower than in other districts, and the cold often severe, owing to the great ice-floes which are frequently carried to this part of Iceland by the Polar current, and which cause occasional spells of cold and foggy weather even during the summer months.

The contrast in temperature between the north and south is often very great. For instance, on the south coast in January the mean temperature

is about 34° F., whereas in the north-west corner of the island it is little above 20° F. The variations, however, around these mean figures, are very considerable. Thus, at Stykkishólmur on the west coast, the warmest mean temperature recorded for March has been 40° F. and the coldest only 8° F.

Owing to its damp and stormy conditions, Iceland has a heavy snowfall, which nourishes the great snowfields, for, of the area of Iceland, about 13,000 sq. kilometres consist of mountain plateaux covered with perpetual ice and snow, such as Vatnajökull, Eyjafjallajökull, and Langjökull, to mention only a few.

In consequence of the changeability of the climate, it is not surprising that the flora of Iceland should be somewhat meagre.

Of trees there are none in existence, except in a few places where there are some woods of very stunted birch trees, and here and there a small mountain ash. Other varieties include shrubs of dwarf willow and birch. Among food plants, the huckleberry and the crowberry grow in a wild state and are very abundant, and in a few places wild strawberries are also found. The edible Iceland moss grows in the mountain highlands.

Agricultural products are very scarce, but potatoes, which were first raised in 1759, are now cultivated with success, and turnips are also grown.

There are many interesting specimens of wild birds, including the puffin, the eider duck, the ptarmigan, the guillemot, the curlew and the wild swan. The sea, lakes and rivers abound in many varieties of excellent fish. Salmon is especially plentiful in the south of the country, and the Ellidaár rivers near Reykjavík are particularly rich in this respect, and are well known to many sportsmen. Of wild animals, reindeer are to be found in the interior, especially in the north-east, and there are also wild cats and foxes. The chief domestic animals are cattle, ponies and sheep, for the growth of grass is luxuriant in many valleys, and during the summer months it is mown for winter fodder. The cattle have mostly to be housed from October to May, when the climate makes it impossible for them to be turned out to pasture. Indeed the winter is a hard time for the Icелander with only four hours of daylight, and sometimes less, and it is not surprising if, during the precious summer months, he tries to make up for this lack of sunshine by seldom retiring to bed before the early hours of the morning; for, during an Icelandic summer, the longest day is twenty-three hours and darkness is unknown.

CHAPTER II

MY VOYAGE OUT

" Lo, from our loitering ship a new land at last to be seen ;
Toothed rocks down the side of the firth, on the East guard a weary
 wide lea,
And black slope the hill-sides above striped adown with their desolate
green :
And a peak rises up on the West from the meeting of cloud and of
sea,
Four-square from base unto point like the buildings of Gods that have
been,
The last of that waste of the mountains all cloud-wreathed, and snow-
flecked and grey,
And bright with the dawn that began just now at the ending of
day."

" Iceland First Seen,"
MORRIS.

IT was a bright sunny morning towards the end of May that I drove from Edinburgh, with my luggage and sketching materials compressed into the reduced space of a hold-all and two small suit-cases, to Leith Docks. My taxi-driver drew up inside the gates while I sought information from the nearest seaman.

" I am sailing for Iceland this afternoon ; can you tell me where to find the boat ? " I asked.

" *Iceland ?* " he queried, while a broad grin slowly spread over his weather-beaten face. " You

are wanting to go to *Iceland*?" Apparently the question seemed to amuse him, but he pointed to where, half hidden amongst the maze of shipping at the far end of the docks, was a very small single-funnel steamer. "There she lies," he said, "that is the Iceland boat, the one flying a flag."

I looked again, and with a thrill I recognized the blue and white flag of the Icelandic Steamship Company, of which I had already seen a photograph.

Shortly after, with the help of the taxi-driver, who also appeared to regard me with amused interest, I carried my luggage on board the s.s. "*Brúarfoss*," for such was the name of the little craft that was to be my home for the next few days. She certainly seemed *very* small to tackle the North Atlantic! Not much over a thousand tons, but she was beautifully clean and very well appointed. So far I had seen none of the crew, but soon an extremely grimy stoker appeared. He only spoke Icelandic, but somehow or other I managed to make him understand I was a passenger, and wanted the steward. To my relief the latter spoke a little English, and soon I had packed my belongings into a very small but airy two-berthed cabin. A few hours later, to the accompaniment of sirens and much shouting and loosening of cables, we slid slowly

out of Leith Docks and my dream of a visit to Iceland was about to be realized, for the adventure had begun !

The ship was carrying a lot of cargo, chiefly timber, but very few passengers. These were mostly Icelanders or Danes. The stewardess, an attractive Icelandic girl, could not understand a word of English, and was much amused at my efforts to converse by means of a small Icelandic phrase book, the parting gift of a friend. I had chosen the upper berth of the little cabin, and she had said that the lower one was occupied by an Icelandic lady who spoke very good English. As a matter of fact, my companion proved to be Scotch, and she told me that she was on a visit to her daughter who had married an Icelandic in the fishing industry near Reykjavík, the capital and the port for which we were bound.

Over the first twenty-four hours of the voyage I draw a veil ! Very rough weather was encountered and all on board for the most part kept to their cabins, but by the second morning the weather had calmed down, every one's spirits rose, and we were a very cheery party that sat down to breakfast at 11.30. It is the custom in an Icelandic boat to have tea or coffee at 8, breakfast at 11.30, coffee at 3.30, dinner at 5.30, and tea and biscuits at 8 o'clock ; a regime that

seems strange at first, but one soon gets accustomed to it. After the 3.30 coffee and cakes, one of the passengers, a cheery little Icelfander who spoke English remarkably well and was in business in Reykjavík, gave me a lesson in Icelandic, and was curious to know what could be my object in visiting Iceland.

I explained that some years before I had met a charming Icelandic girl, and her description of the wonders and beauties of her native land had filled me with a desire to go and paint there. Also I was anxious to travel right across country from south to north if possible, and to get to know something about the people and customs of a land of which we in England seem to know extraordinarily little.

"That is quite right," and he laughed. "You English seem to think that we Icelanders are sort of Esquimaux, feeding on blubber and living in ice-houses!"

I had to confess that at one time I also had had a hazy picture somewhat if not quite resembling this unflattering description in my *own* mind!

"But you know," he added, "that if you wish to travel across country to Akureyri in the north, you will have to ride most of the way, for there are very few roads, and you will have to take

a tent, and engage a guide to go with you ; and guides are expensive from Reykjavík."

I explained that I intended to manage without a regular guide ; that I should go from farm to farm, taking ponies from different places, and local guides from stage to stage.

He agreed that would be possible if I kept more or less round the coast, where I should come across farms that would be able to give me shelter for the night, and perhaps supply ponies. " But how will you manage with the language ? The country people speak no English ! "

I showed him a little book in which I intended to write down all the questions I should require to ask, and I explained that I should get some one to translate them on the opposite pages in Icelandic. " I can then speak to the people from my book, and I feel sure I will get on quite all right."

" Well, well, that is a good idea ! Yes, perhaps you will manage," he added a little dubiously.

For the next half-hour we studied my map, and he gave me advice as to the various routes I could follow. We were interrupted by the wireless, which the captain had had tuned in to London for my benefit ; and then, from all those miles away out in the North Atlantic Ocean, I heard

Big Ben strike the hour and the familiar voice of the announcer from 2 L.O., London, give the latest news of the General Election, and I realized afresh the miracle of wireless and the wonderful age in which we are living, when distance is so rapidly becoming obliterated !

The captain told me that we were due to pass the Faroe Islands at midnight, and that early on the morrow we should arrive at the Vestmannaeyjar (Westman Islands), where we should stop several hours for the unloading of cargo. I determined to be up early, for we were due about 5 a.m., and I was told I should get my first view of Iceland and the snowy peaks of Hekla if it were clear ; and then on the following evening, the captain said, he hoped to reach Reykjavík and so complete the voyage in the almost record time of just under four days from Leith.

After the eight o'clock tea and biscuits, there was much singing and drinking of healths in the little saloon. My friend of the afternoon and others sang the Icelandic National Hymn and other native songs, and then they all raised their glasses and drank to my health and good fortune on my journey across Iceland ! Having by now learned a few isolated words of the language, I was able to thank them in Icelandic, which amused and pleased them very much.



HEKLA FROM OFF THE ICELANDIC COAST

Unfortunately the next morning was misty, and there was not much to be seen when we put in at the Vestmannaeyjar, except the immediate view of the little harbour, and on each side the towering cliffs, sheer walls of grim and scarred rock, that rose to an immense height, lonely and impressive, from out of the sea. But ten weeks later on the return voyage, when we again reached the same spot, I went on board at 4 a.m. and was rewarded this time by an exquisite dawn. Never shall I forget the magnificent and awe-inspiring sight of the southern Icelandic coast-line as seen behind the foreground of the wild and jagged rocks to the east of these islands. The great Eyjafjall and Mýrdals Jökulls were silhouetted in blue and purple against the amber sky, while behind them arose the white majestic cone of Hekla almost unearthly in her beauty.

The Vestmannæyjar consist mainly of great fantastic masses of lava, formed by gigantic accumulations of volcanic eruption in the Tertiary Age. There is no water, and the inhabitants depend on what they can collect of rain-water for drinking and washing purposes.

The islands take their name from the Irish slaves, "Men from the West," who are said to have fled here in 879, and to have settled on these rocky shores, having first murdered their

master, Leif Hrodmarsson, the foster-brother of Ingólf Arnarson.

Shortly after, Ingólf and his followers were searching along the south Icelandic coast for his high-seat pillars (the carved posts of a chieftain's settle) which he had, according to custom, thrown overboard, in order that they might drift ashore, and so lead the way to the land where he believed he was appointed by fate to make his home.

While searching along the shore, he found Leif's dead body, and soon traced the murderers, whom he found hiding upon the Vestmannaeyjar. Needless to say, he avenged his foster-brother by slaying them all.

The cliffs of these islands are haunted by thousands of sea birds, mostly puffins and guillemots, which have their breeding-places here, and the inhabitants have various ways of hunting them for the exportation of their feathers. The life of the fowler is a very dangerous one. He is forced to creep along a narrow ledge of rock, hundreds of feet above the sea. He carries a bird net swung on a long pole, and on coming near to the sitting birds he throws his net over them and so captures them. I heard afterwards that, during the time we had put in at the islands, a fowler had been killed. His foot had slipped on

the wet rocks and he had fallen into the sea far below and was drowned.

But the chief occupation of the inhabitants, as on the Icelandic coast, is fishing, mainly for cod. The fish, after having been temporarily cured, is brought home, cleaned and dried. The drying process is a long and tedious one. The fish is spread out on stone flats along the shore and, as treatment progresses, it grows whiter and whiter so long as the sun shines upon it, but on the appearance of rain or mist it must instantly be collected and covered up, or it will be spoilt. This work of fish drying is carried on by the women while the men are away, and large quantities of it are prepared for exportation, as is also the case in the Faroes, and goes to Spain, Italy and ~~Germany~~ Britain.

We remained at the islands four hours to unload cargo, and I watched a lot of timber being taken off in small boats ; and later a party of Westman Islanders, who were coming to Reykjavík, were taken on board from a rowing-boat. The sea was rough and it was a wonder how they ever managed to get on board ! The men would wait till a big wave would lift the boat on a level with the iron steps up the side of the "Brúarfoss," they would then make a wild jump for it and land safely on the steps. The women were lifted up by a

man in the rowing-boat and half thrown into the arms of two others who waited to catch them on the steps. One woman had a baby; it was thrown across and caught in the same casual way! Another had a crutch and her leg in irons, but somehow or other she was hauled aboard, and to my admiration none of the women showed the slightest fear or consternation whatsoever during this risky proceeding! One or two of them wore the national dress, with their hair in long plaits down their backs, but others wore quite fashionable coats with fur collars, and thin high-heeled shoes! During the afternoon the sun shone brilliantly. Our course followed the extreme south-west coast of Iceland, of which we had a good view. It consists mainly of volcanic mountains and desert, and is utterly uninhabited for great distances. A sandstorm was blowing, giving the appearance of a yellowish mist over the desolate shore.

We reached Reykjavík on the 1st of June about 7.30 p.m. The quay was crowded, for the arrival of the mail-boat is always something of an event. Many of the women wore the national dress. On landing I was met by Mr. Stefán Stefánsson, a guide belonging to Reykjavík, who speaks English very well and is a mine of useful information. He took me to the Hotel Ísland,

where I was given a room overlooking the very noisy main street. The little hotel, which consists of a public dining-room and a fair number of bedrooms, is built of wood and corrugated iron like most of the houses in Reykjavík, and at every window is a fire escape consisting of a long coil of rope fixed to a big nail inside. A new hotel is now being built, and will shortly be opened ; it is much larger and I was told it would contain every convenience and comfort ! After dinner Stefánsson reappeared and discussed at length my proposed tour. He agreed it would be feasible ; but, like my friend of the boat, was doubtful as to how I should manage without taking an English-speaking guide with me. Finally, seeing I was determined to go without, he took the greatest trouble in writing down for me the various stages of my journey to the north. I was anxious to go via Snæfellsnes, riding right round the peninsula beneath the glacier of Snæfells-Jökull, for I had been told that the coast scenery here was the most magnificent in Iceland. Stefánsson tried at first to dissuade me from following this way by land, explaining that, unless they could help it, no travellers, Icelandic or otherwise, ever took that route—which was right off the beaten track. Moreover, the way was long and difficult, the farms very few and far between, and what accom-

modation there was would probably be of the roughest, but he could not say what they would be like as he had never been there. He suggested that it would be much easier for me to follow the route from Borgarnes across to Stykkishólmur, where there was a road of sorts, and not attempt to ride round the peninsula. Finally, however, when he realized that my mind was made up and nothing would stop me, he arose splendidly to the occasion, marking the various points upon my map where I should come across farms, and the approximate mileage between each, right up to Akureyri and beyond. He also suggested places of interest for me to visit in the south before leaving for the long tour.

It was nearly midnight when I at last went up to bed, but I found sleep impossible for some while, for it was still very light, the sky being flushed with a wonderful rose pink. The townsfolk showed no signs whatever of going to rest, and the street below was still crowded, and raucous with the hooting of numerous motor-horns, for Reykjavík boasts of many and noisy cars! When at last I did succeed in dropping asleep, it was not for long, for I awoke half smothered by the huge feather bed enclosed in a sheet which takes the place of ordinary sheets and blankets in all Icelandic homes. I finally lay on the top of it,

using the quilt and my rug as a covering. Later, like everything else, I was to get accustomed to the feather bed cover and on many a cold night up country to welcome its downy warmth !

CHAPTER III

A FEW DAYS IN REYKJAVÍK

REYKJAVÍK, the capital of Iceland, is a busy little seaport town on the south coast of Faxa Bay. Its population is rapidly on the increase, owing largely to the growth of the fishing industry which, since the advent of the steam trawler to Iceland twenty-five years ago, has made enormous strides. The inhabitants now number about twenty thousand, a fifth of the entire population of the country. I found it well worth while to spend a day or two here before going up country, as there was much of interest to see.

The first day after my arrival happened to be a Sunday, and after dinner I went to the public square, in the centre of which a band plays on Sunday evenings during the summer months. I was rewarded by a picturesque scene. All the townsfolk, most of the women wearing national dress, were slowly promenading in twos and threes



AN ICELANDIC LADY IN NATIONAL DRESS

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SMALL SONS OF ICELAND

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round the green square of grass in the centre of which the band was playing. Some of the younger women were strikingly beautiful, with their long braids of golden hair, which they wore looped and hanging down their backs. Certainly "woman's glory" is seen at its best in the luxuriant tresses of the Icelandic maiden who has not, for the most part, yet adopted the shingle or bob! They wear a small, round, black cap, usually of velvet, from which hangs a long tassel with a silver ornament, a full black skirt to the ankles, a short silk apron often of some gay colour, and on best occasions a tight-fitting black bodice with elaborate silver or gold ornamentations and laced across over a white blouse with full sleeves. Out of doors they generally wear in addition a long fringed shawl, sometimes of black embroidered silk or cashmere, and other times of gaily coloured Paisley, if the wearer can afford it. Occasionally, in place of the shawl, they wear modern raincoats. These look very drab and incongruous with the national headgear, as may be imagined! Many of the younger women and girls of Reykjavík have now adopted modern European dress, favouring the latest Paris fashion, and, as a dear old Icelandic lady complained to me, they prefer to shiver in their silk stockings and flimsy underwear rather than cling to the warm and suitable costume of

their forefathers! Most of the older women in Reykjavík, however, are still faithful to the national dress, and up country it is universally worn by old and young alike for best occasions.

I stood for some time watching the people as they slowly processed up and down, and I could not help contrasting their stately, almost austere appearance with that, say, of an Italian crowd. Nothing could be more different. The Icelanders, especially the women, are inclined to be grave and silent by nature, and you rarely hear them laugh out of doors. It is almost as if the stern rigours of the climate have left their mark upon the national character. At 8.30 there was a pause, and the band struck up the slow, dignified notes of the Icelandic national anthem, which was first written in 1874 to commemorate the one thousandth anniversary of the nation's birth. Unlike those of many other countries, Iceland's national hymn is devoid of all martial feeling; if anything it is humble in tone, and may be likened, more than anything else, to a hymn in praise of the wonder and beauty of Nature. The following is a literal translation by Kneeland :

O God of our land, O our land's God,
We praise Thy holy, holy name.
From the solar systems of the heavens wind Thee a wreath,
Thy Legions the times' collections.

Before Thee is one day as a thousand years,
And a thousand years one day, not more.
One Eternity's small flower with quivering tears,
Which adores its God and dies.
Iceland's thousand years,
Iceland's thousand years,
One eternity's small flower with quivering tears,
Which adores its God and dies.

At the first sound of the hymn all talking ceased. The crowd stood still as if rooted to the spot. The men removed their hats, and there was dead silence until the last plaintive note had died away. Then, with much shaking of hands and greeting of one another, the people rapidly dispersed, and soon the square was nearly empty and a bitter north wind drove me back to the hotel.

I found it hard to sleep the first few nights, for there was no darkness, even at midnight, and no one in Reykjavík ever seemed to think of going to bed till the early hours of the morning, and, if you were asked to spend an evening with an Icelandic family, they would consider it an insult should you make your departure before twelve o'clock. The people, no doubt, feel they cannot make enough of the precious daylight, when for so many months of the year they see so little of it!

I was fortunate in having a lovely bright day

for my walk to the hot springs outside the town, where I saw the open-air bathing pool, of natural warm water. Some children were being taught to swim, and they were much excited when I took a photograph! I also saw the open-air laundry, where the women conveniently are able to make use of further hot springs for the washing of clothes. It is common to find these springs of more or less boiling water in many parts of the country. Some of the farmers, with great enterprise, have utilized them for heating their houses, so doing away with the difficulty of obtaining fuel, which in many places is extremely difficult to get, during the long Arctic winter. Indeed, numbers of the smaller farmsteads away up country are not even able to obtain peat, and are forced to burn dried sheeps' dung.

About fifteen miles from Reykjavík there are further hot springs, in connexion with which there is a flourishing greenhouse for the growing of tomatoes, and in other valleys, too, I frequently saw the familiar sight of the clouds of white steam. No doubt the frequent presence of these boiling springs is responsible for the name of many of the places. Reykur means smoke, and so we have Reykjavík, "smoking harbour"; and Reykholt, the birthplace of Snorri Sturluson, means "smoking hill."



A FISH DRYING-GROUND

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REYKJAVÍK, THE LAKE

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On my way back from the Reykjavík laundry, I passed a fish drying-ground, where some girls were busy working. They had been handling wet fish and wore big oilskin aprons and coloured handkerchiefs twisted round their heads. They looked hardy and strong, and stared at me with great curiosity ; and, when I took out my camera, they all rushed away screaming with laughter, except two less shy than the rest, who allowed themselves to be photographed ! I got a lift part of the way back to Reykjavík on a lorry full of dried fish, the driver most courteously refusing to take any payment whatever.

Iceland's greatest industry is the fisheries, and the big centre for Reykjavík is at Hafnarfjörður, about ten miles beyond the town. I drove out in a little public motor. The road lay over desolate lava fields ; the distant mountains were hidden by clouds ; it was raining at intervals, and the general aspect was sinister and gloomy in the extreme. I was reminded of hearing on the wireless the familiar sentence : " A depression is centred over Iceland ! "

On arrival at Hafnarfjörður, with its collection of corrugated iron bungalows built along a wild and lonely shore, I went over a cod-fish factory owned by an Englishman, with the exception of two other business men I had met in Reykjavík,

the only Briton I had come across since my arrival in Iceland, and the only other one I was destined to see for many weeks to come. He seemed overjoyed to meet a fellow countrywoman in that isolated spot, gave me coffee and showed me over the yard. Inside a big shed some women were packing the dried fish in great stacks ready for export to Spain and other countries. The fish are split open, cured and dried in the sun on lava beds; at night they are covered by waterproof sheets, stacked up and then laid out once more to continue drying. The work, as at the Westman Islands, is mainly done by women and girls who get well paid and are said to be wonderful workers.

With the exception of a particularly fine Roman Catholic Church of grey stone, which has recently been added to the town, the buildings of Reykjavík can by no stretch of the imagination be called beautiful! The majority of the houses are of wood, faced and roofed with corrugated iron, and generally painted a drab brown. Some, however, are brightened with gay little gardens whose green plots of grass and familiar flowers are a welcome relief. The principal buildings, such as the Parliament House—containing some interesting pictures by modern Icelandic painters—and the National Library and Museum, are solidly

built of stone. The Cathedral is no larger than a good-sized church, but the people are proud of it, for it contains a font presented to Iceland by the great sculptor, Thorvaldsen, who was himself an Icelander by birth.

I found the National Museum of great interest. In addition to the fine collections representing Icelandic and foreign ecclesiastical art, wood carvings and native metal work, it contains a small but interesting series of antiquities, especially bronze brooches, of the saga period. There is also a geological section. But one of the most interesting exhibits is undoubtedly the finds from the excavations of Njáll's house. These have been recently discovered by the curator.

On leaving the Museum, I visited the National Library in the same building. It is indeed a remarkable one for so small a nation, for it contains no less than 233,000 books and an exceedingly valuable collection of original manuscripts. The collection of books on chess presented by the late Dr. Willard Fiske, an American professor, is among the largest of its kind in Europe. The Icelanders are keen chess players, and greatly appreciated this gift. The librarian very kindly offered to show me the original manuscripts, priceless in value, of the famous Passion Hymns; the work of the great religious poet of Iceland, Hall-

grímur Pjetursson, born in the year 1614, and for many hundreds of years the spiritual guide of the people. His hymns are still sung to-day during Lent in the farmhouses throughout the country, and his portrait is given the place of honour in many a little home.

It was to see this famous manuscript that a well-known American collector and literary critic travelled all the way to Iceland. The story goes that, on landing, he made his way straight to the public library. Then, having gazed upon the precious manuscript and held it reverently in his hands, he immediately returned by the next boat to America, declaring that he had seen all he wished to see in Iceland! I, too, was allowed to hold the treasured book. The librarian produced it from out of an iron safe, saying as he did so that Iceland would never part from it, "No, not for all the money in the world!"

I saw also a fine collection of English classics, for many Icelanders both read and speak the English language, which, together with German, is now a compulsory subject taught in the schools. Illiteracy is practically unknown in Iceland.) All can read and write, and in the isolated little farms up country, where there are no schools, the parents frequently teach the children themselves during the long winter evenings, which are devoted to

study and reading. The language, which is practically unchanged since the days of the first Viking settlers, and is the original of all the Norse tongues, has kept so pure that the average Icelandic child can read the sagas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with far less difficulty than many an Englishman finds in reading an early edition of Shakespeare or Bacon.

At the library I was struck by the number of Sir Oliver Lodge's works, especially those on psychic research. During my stay in Reykjavík I found there was a widespread interest in this subject, and I had an interesting interview with Mr. Einar Kvaran, poet and author, who told me how he was the founder of the Icelandic Society of Psychical Research, which was started in 1905 and now numbers about four hundred members and has a good library. Mr. Kvaran told me of remarkable experiences he had had in the early days of the society, when investigating the psychic phenomena produced through the mediumship of a young Iclander, the son of a farmer. The séances were carried out in a scientific spirit, and with a sincere desire to arrive at the truth as regards survival of personality. They were attended both by the late Professor Nielsson, Professor of Theology at the Reykjavík University, and by the Lutheran Bishop of Iceland. Both

men became convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena and were enthusiastic supporters of the work of the society.

Theosophy has also many adherents in Iceland, and in the far north, at the little fishing port of Isafjörður, I found there was a Theosophical lodge with a beautiful little temple, its members being nearly all fishermen or farmers.

The Icelanders, with their generous, sincere character and their love of poetry and Nature, are essentially a spiritual people, and the unseen world is very real to many of them.

The national Church of the country is Lutheran, of which there are two large churches in Reykjavík and many little parsonages spread over the country, the pastor generally being a farmer as well as a cleric. There is also an Icelandic branch of the Salvation Army, with headquarters at Reykjavík.

I have seldom been in a town as small as Reykjavík which contains so many good bookshops; but this is not surprising, for the Icelanders, especially the farmers, are exhaustive readers, and take the keenest interest in the literature of other countries besides their own. During the dark winter days, when they are unable to work, these remarkable people will often spend long hours in attempting to learn foreign languages,

and it is not altogether unusual, on coming across an isolated little farmstead away out in the wilds, to find that the farmer is capable of speaking three languages : English, German and Icelandic. Many of our own countryfolk might well take a lesson from such industry !

CHAPTER IV

MODERN ICELANDIC ART

DURING the last half century there has been what may be described as an artistic renaissance in Iceland, which has reached its zenith in the sculpture of Einar Jónsson. During the country's earlier history Art has been very little to the fore, almost negligible, in fact; although if one visits the National Museum at Reykjavík one realizes that since very early times there have been attempts at painting on canvas and wooden boards, the subjects mostly being of a religious nature to illustrate altar pieces, etc. One may also see vellum manuscripts bearing illuminated decoration of a sort, a few of them indicating an artistic skill of no mean order, when one remembers that (the painters of those days, being completely cut off from the outside world, were unable to receive any teaching,) and had no opportunity of studying the work of the great masters. Indeed, Iceland has been separated so long from civiliza-



THORFINNUR KARLSEFNI

tion, and her artists have been so poor, that it is only comparatively within the last few years that they have been able to study abroad and obtain a knowledge of technique. The result is a group of painters who, as may be expected, are essentially drawn to landscape subjects, receiving their inspiration from the grand and rugged scenery of their native land. I had the pleasure of meeting Ásgrimur Jónsson, who is now the oldest living Icelandic painter. He studied at the Copenhagen Academy, and his landscapes show a great feeling for the mystery and vast open spaces of Iceland, and are full of atmospheric quality. But to quote from an article by Halldór Hermannsson in the "American-Scandinavian Review" of April, 1929:

"By general consent of critics, the most original of the painters is Jón Stefánsson. He studied with Chr. Zahrtmman in Copenhagen and afterwards with Henry Matisse in Paris, to whom he acknowledges great indebtedness. According to his own statement he is especially attracted by the sub-arctic, volcanic Icelandic landscape which offers so many and difficult problems: in comparison with the landscape of continental Europe where he learned his art, that of his native land appears to him as a nude body compared to one fully dressed. His pictures of Icelandic scenery are also different from those of most of his fellow painters, they represent above all the strange and uncanny (by some critics called the demoniac)

elements to be found in Icelandic scenery. One of his most interesting paintings is that showing a homesick Icelandic pony running over stony ground towards its native place, with heavy clouds in the background. Those best acquainted with Iceland will appreciate this impressive canvas."

An exhibition of the work of Icelandic painters was held in Denmark and Germany in 1928, and was interesting in that it revealed the striking development of a young art in a far distant land. In time to come we may look forward to an Icelandic school of painting that will take an important place in the world of Art.

But it was Icelandic sculpture that first attracted attention on the Continent, and that as far as Icelandic art is concerned still holds the first place; and the work of Einar Jónsson is now becoming internationally known and appreciated, especially in America, where his name is already famous.

Away up on a hill-top on the outskirts of Reykjavík and commanding a magnificent view of the great expanse of surrounding country and of the harbour, beyond which, far away, the rugged outline of the peninsula of Snæfellsnes with its snowy peaks can clearly be seen, is a small, impressive, concrete building of simple and modern design. It is the public gallery designed

by the sculptor for the exhibition of his works, and erected at the expense of the nation, who happily has fully realized the genius of her great son by honouring him thus in his lifetime, and arranging that he may be free to pursue his art unhampered by financial cares.

Einar Jónsson, or the poet sculptor as he has been called, was born in 1873. His father was a farmer and his mother was descended from a famous old clerical family. The home of his childhood was in one of the grandest and wildest districts of Iceland, not far from Hekla, whose snow-clad summit he could see from his window. As a boy, for some while, Jónsson worked on his father's farm, although he devoted all his spare time to wood-carving and modelling. His earliest efforts were, as a matter of fact, produced at the age of four years. Even then he showed considerable promise and, as he grew older, he showed the philosophical and mystical bent that later was to so greatly influence his work. At the age of eighteen so advanced was his talent that his friends decided to send him to study sculpture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. From here he went later to study in Rome and other cities, finally returning to Copenhagen, where he started his professional career. For a while the young Iclander had to endure poverty and

hardships. He had his own notions of art and, rather than adapt his methods to the views of others, he would refuse the commissions that were offered to him. Consequently it was many years before he came into his own; but in 1917 his genius was acclaimed in America, for which country he had been commissioned to execute a statue of Thorfinnur Karlsefni, the first Icelandic Viking to discover and settle in America. As a result of this magnificent piece of work, Einar Jónsson's fame was now assured, and had he decided to accept the many invitations to remain in America no doubt he could have made a fortune. But the call of his native land was too strong. It was from Iceland that all his first inspiration was drawn, and it was to Iceland that throughout his many years of wandering he had ever been true. And so to-day Einar Jónsson, as curator of the Einar Jónsson Museum, as the gallery is called, is free to devote his life to his work and the pursuit of his ideals. He and his wife, a charming Danish lady, live in a little flat built on the roof of the museum, where I had the great pleasure of meeting them and spending a memorable afternoon.

The gallery is open to the general public on Sundays and Wednesdays. I had heard from several of the interest and beauty of Einar



DAWN

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EVOLUTION

(p. 48)

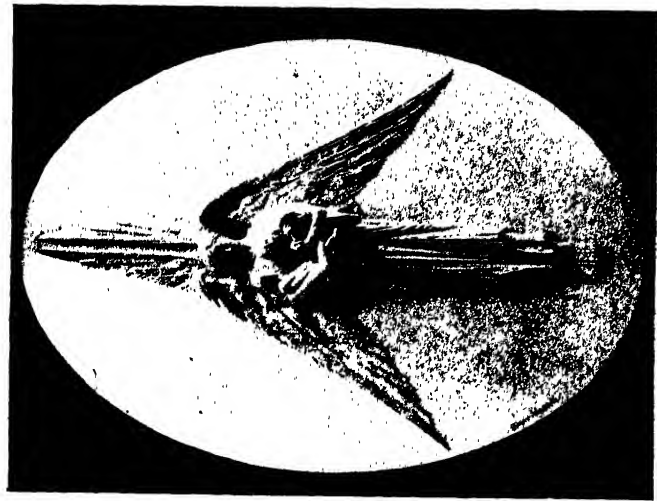
Jónsson's work ; but, when on the first opportunity I visited the collection for myself, I was certainly unprepared for what I saw. The wonder of those grand conceptions in stone and bronze is beyond my power to describe. They combine intense strength and power with real spiritual beauty, and a modern feeling for pattern and design. The subjects are mostly of a mystical and symbolical nature. He who created them has a message to give to the world, the triumph of spirit over matter. To quote from R. Rape-cowl's article in "The Review of Reviews" for December, 1915 :

"Jónsson is . . . primarily a delineator of the spirit, and of the strivings of the spirit in the bondage of matter. His quest is of spiritual truth, rather than of earthly beauty. According to the individual temperament we may regard Jónsson as a poet weaving a web of fancy in stone or bronze, or as a seer revealing spiritual truths in myth or allegory."

One of his most powerful works perhaps is "Dawn." Here you have the massive and brutal form of a giant troll with a beautiful little figure of a captured maiden in his grasp. He is shaking his great fist in fury at the first rays of the rising sun, for he realizes that the sight of these rays will turn, and are even now turning him to stone,

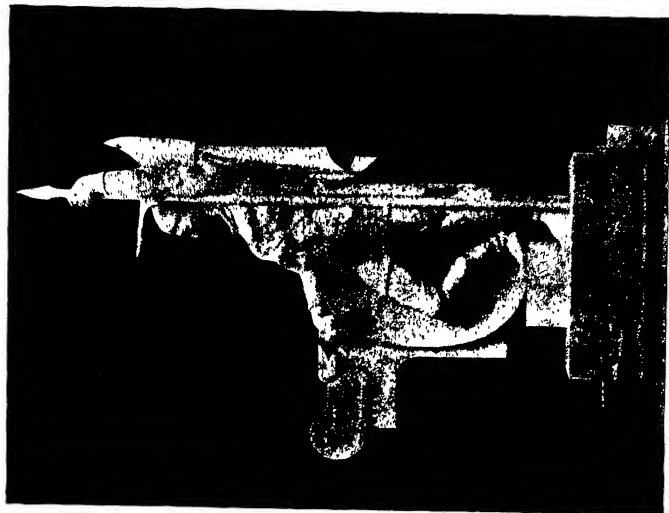
and consequently he will lose what he has stolen. The countryfolk believe that many of the weird, almost human shapes formed by the lava boulders and rocks were once trolls who have been turned into stone in this way.

It has been suggested that Einar Jónsson's work is akin to that of the old Icelandic skalds or poets, who frequently used aspects of Nature to symbolize their poetical ideas. In "The Wave of the Ages," with its beauty of rhythm, form and line, this feeling for poetical metaphor is clearly shown. The wave has been skilfully attuned to a female form, a symbol of humanity, ever being drawn upward by the force of life, and in the wake of the wave are countless numbers of human beings only half aroused, but drawn upwards towards the light by the same irresistible life-force. At the top, nearest the heart of the wave, is a fully awakened form who turns to shout to those beneath him, his desire to ascend having become conscious. This same idea of the growth of the human soul is to be found in "Evolution," which interesting group shows man gradually arising from the beast in himself, and is symbolical of mankind arising towards nobler forms of being. As in many other of his works, Jónsson's conception of progress is dominated by the Christian ideal, and here we see at the summit of this group



THE ANGEL OF LIFE

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INGÓLF ARNARSON

(p. 49)

the Spirit of the New Age leaning upon the Cross with arms uplifted towards the Light. The same faith is expressed in "The Crucible," which, to my mind, is the most beautiful of the sculptor's works. Here again we have the triumph of spirit over matter, and the growth of the soul through suffering, and once more we are reminded of the crest of a wave in the exquisite feeling of rhythm which is present.

"The Angel of Life" with Humanity, weak as a little child, clasped in his arms, is another fine conception, and the noble statues of Ingólf Arnarson and Thorfinnur Karlsefni are full of life and vigour. But every work in that little gallery—and there are many others besides those I have mentioned—is the conception of a genius, a poet and a mystic; and surely the time will soon come when Einar Jónsson will be generally recognized as a great master of his art, not only in America and on the Continent where his fame has already spread, but in this country too.

After I had spent some while in the gallery, the sculptor took me to his studio, a room adjoining, where he showed me more of his work, and some interesting paintings and drawings not publicly exhibited.

These latter, like the sculpture, are mostly of a symbolical and mystical nature.

I was struck by one picture in particular : it was called "Jól 1917," and represented the Madonna and Child sheltering in a cave hollowed in the side of an iceberg, and surrounded by snow-fields.

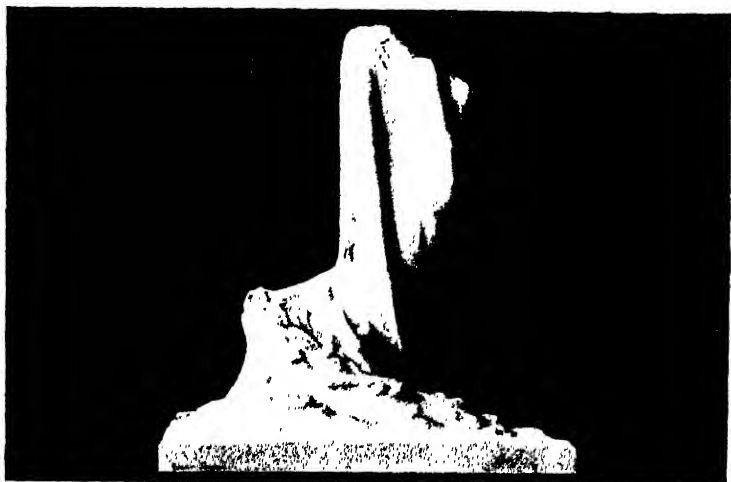
Einar Jónsson explained the meaning to me as follows :

"When all the rest of Europe was seething with unrest during the terrible war, Iceland was the one really peaceful little spot in which the Mother and Child could rest at Christmas-time. That is why I painted that picture," he added.

There were many other drawings, all interesting, and some vivid and beautiful in colouring. They are reproduced, together with fine photographs of the complete collection of Einar Jónsson's sculpture, in a book which is on sale in the gallery.

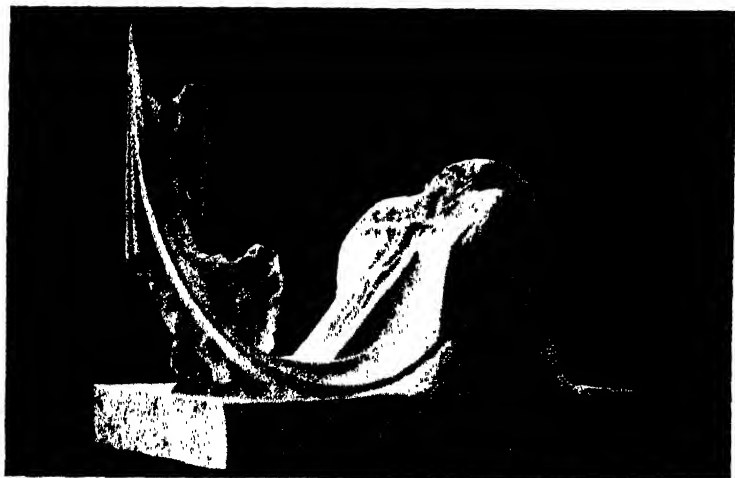
I was invited to stay for coffee, and before leaving I had the pleasure of listening to some beautiful old Icelandic folk-songs, played with great feeling and expression on an organ in the studio by a young Icelandic musician.

It was nearly seven o'clock when I said good-bye, and so ended an afternoon the interest and the pleasure of which will remain in my memory always.



THE WAVE OF THE AGES

(p. 48)



THE CRUCIBLE

(p. 49)

CHAPTER V

AT THINGVELLIR

NO place in Iceland is of greater interest to the traveller than the great plain of Thingvellir, with its mighty rocks and chasms, its beautiful lake in the background, and its historic associations. For here, centuries ago, as we have already seen, the Vikings of old founded a republic, made of themselves a Free State, and introduced their own laws and constitution, which latter, theoretically speaking, compares most favourably with the monarchies and empires of the rest of Europe at that time.

On June 26th, 1930, Iceland will celebrate the one thousandth anniversary of the birth of her Parliament at Thingvellir. Thousands will flock to the plain for the celebrations, and among the visitors will be many Icelandic settlers from Canada, and also representatives from foreign Powers who have been invited to attend. It is said that no Icelfander can stand on this famous

spot for the first time without experiencing a sense of deep emotion and of burning pride in his country.

At the foot of the mountains overlooking the lake, and about half an hour's walk from Thingvellir, is a farmhouse where it is possible to stay very comfortably, and I determined to spend about ten days here for sketching and exploring the beauties of the place.

The distance from Reykjavík is only about thirty miles, and as there is now quite a good road it is possible to motor. I got a seat in a timber lorry that was going in that direction. My suitcases and hold-all were wedged in between various packing-cases, and I sat in front between the driver and an elderly countrywoman who was travelling in my direction. We first had to collect goods in various parts of the town; this took some time and it was nearly 7 p.m. before we got away.

For some distance we climbed through desolate, lava-strewn country bare of all vegetation, with a background of mountains streaked with snow. At one point we came upon a stout and cheerful peasant woman seated on a rock by the wayside smoking a cigarette, and with a bundle beside her. She was waiting for the chance of being picked up by a passing car and given a lift; for these

lorries, of which there are quite a number in the vicinity of Reykjavík and in other places where there happen to be possible roads, are eagerly sought after by the countryfolk, who frequently make use of them as we should use a motor-bus.

Somehow or other the driver managed to squeeze the stout new-comer between himself and me. We were now four on the front seat, and how he managed to find space to drive with the new-comer's arm around his waist—for there was no other room for it—I can't imagine! In addition, several youths had perched themselves on the packing-cases behind. We continued on our bumpy way, for the road, although superior to many Icelandic roads, was plentifully supplied with big pot holes. Finally, some miles farther on, the stout lady and the youths left us, evidently for some farm near. They shook hands several times with every one all round, and I was careful to remove my glove first in the approved fashion, for an Icelander always does this. I had already come to the conclusion that a good motto for those visiting Iceland is: "When in doubt shake hands." It is always necessary, for instance, to shake hands with your hostess after a meal, during which she often waits upon you herself.

After our companions had left us, the scenery

underwent a dramatic change. Gone was the desolate, lava-strewn country through which we had passed, and there below us was a lovely lake ; forty square miles of blue water enclosed on three sides with a ring of red and purple mountain peaks dominated by the snow-capped cone of Hengill, with its boiling springs sending up thin columns of white steam. In places the grass round the lake was a brilliant green and the lava boulders were softened with lichen and moss. About 9 p.m. we came in sight of Kárastadir, the farm where I was to stay ; it was away over moorland some distance from the road and built under the shelter of high hills that towered up behind and were streaked with newly fallen-snow.

— The lorry driver dumped my luggage by the roadside and, after vigorously sounding his horn to attract the attention of the farmer, he shook me warmly by the hand and continued on his way. I could see some figures running about by the farmhouse and, after waving to them, I left my suit-cases where they were and started to walk across the fields over the rough cart track that led to the farm. Soon I saw a man and two children hastening to meet me. To my relief, the farmer, for it was he, spoke a word or two of English and, after giving me a courteous welcome, he went off to fetch my belongings while I made myself

acquainted with the rest of the household. There was the farmer's wife, a tall, fine-looking woman, very shy and silent ; an old granny ; and another woman, who helped with the cooking. There were also at least eight children, the youngest about eighteen months. After they had all, one by one, shaken hands with me, I was shown to a tiny bedroom with a clean boarded floor, a table with a basin and jug, and the bed with its usual mountainous eiderdown covering.

The most common form of farm building in the country districts is still the *bær*, a cottage with earthen walls, often put together with peat and lava stones and having wooden gables. The inside walls are generally lined with wood and the roof is clinker built ; although some of the oldest dwellings have thatched roofs of earth and grass. In Reykjavík and the more important villages the houses are invariably built of wood and usually coated with corrugated iron and sometimes with concrete. This form of building is beginning to take the place of the old *bær* even up country, and Kárastadir proved to be a farm of the latter modern type. In common with many others it possesses a telephone, for Iceland has a wonderful telephone service, and during the last twenty-five years a great part of the country has been linked together by this means, and many an isolated

little farmstead is now able to be in telephonic communication with its neighbours.

The next day I went to see for myself that about which I had read and heard so much since my arrival in Iceland, the historic plain of Thingvellir and the great gorge of Almannagjá. Half an hour's walk parallel with the lake and over rough moorland strewn with lava boulders brought me to the entrance of the gorge, a narrow cleft between huge, fantastic rocks down which the road suddenly dipped, leading eventually on to the green and fertile plain, far below, watered by the River Öxará, and terminating in a fine range of hills, the highest peak, Mount Skjaldbreidur being covered with snow.

From a geological point of view the plain of Thingvellir is intensely interesting. In the distant past—how many æons no one knows—a great eruption took place from one of the volcanoes in the vicinity. The valley was filled with a mighty flow of boiling lava. In time the surface cooled, and it is believed that the fluid beneath forced its way out by an opening where the lake now lies, thus forming, as it were, a gigantic cavern. As time passed the roof of the cavern shrank, a great earthquake followed and the entire crust collapsed, breaking away from the mountain slopes on either side of the valley and forming two great



AN OLD ICELANDIC FARM

parallel rifts of rock, the one on which I was standing being the Almannagjá, and that on the opposite side of the plain the Hrafnagjá. Except for the little church and parsonage in the valley, the scene is the same to-day as it was a thousand years ago, when the Althing met for the first time.

There has been much difference of opinion as to the exact site of the Lögberg (Law Mount), from which the laws were proclaimed. At one time it was believed to have been in the vicinity of Hrafnagjá, but this theory has now been disproved, and the actual position of the Lögberg is said to have been up on the steep hill which slopes away from the eastern side of the Almannagjá, down to the plain slightly to the south of the spot where the River Öxará flows out of the chasm.

The story of how Thingvellir was originally chosen as the meeting place for the Althing is a picturesque one. We learn from Ari Fródi that Ulfjót, a Norwegian settler, from the southern district of Iceland, was chosen in 927 to prepare the code of laws, and the constitution. While he was in Norway engaged on this important task, his foster-brother, Grím Geitskor (Goatbeard) was delegated to select a suitable site for the National Assembly. Had he searched all over Iceland, he

could not have found a more convenient nor a more impressive place than that which was finally chosen, the green plain of Thingvellir, with its sparkling river, and in the background its beautiful lake, surrounded with mountains, blue and mysterious.

As I stood on the ridge of rocks at the top of Almannagjá, looking down over the vast plain, it was easy to picture the animated scene it must have presented in ancient days when it was crowded with people who had gathered from all over the country, for the National Assembly. I went back in imagination a thousand years to that most momentous of all days in the history of Iceland, when the question of the religion of the country hung in the balance. I seemed to see the vast crowd waiting in breathless silence while Thorgeir mounted the Lögberg and announced that in future the law of the land demanded that Iceland should forsake the pagan gods and worship the Christ. And then the scene changed, and I saw before me a picture of the games and sports that were being followed amid keen excitement, for during the two-weeks' session of the Althing this was part of the programme. Horse fighting was a feature for some while, but this cruel sport was forbidden by law after a time. The most popular sport was wrestling, and this



AT THINGVELLIR, FACING THE LÖGBERG

takes place to-day in exactly the same form as it was practised a thousand years ago ; it is called the Royal Glima, and is the oldest national sport in the world with the exception of the ancient Greek sports. The game depends much on suppleness, more so than on strength or weight, and is slightly reminiscent of Cumberland wrestling.

After a while I walked down the steep gorge, and finally out on to the famous plain itself with its winding river, the scene of many a bloody skirmish in the past. It is recorded in the sagas how, on many occasions when rival chieftains could not decide their differences, they would plunge into the Öxará, shallow at this point, and here fight hand to hand in the water until one of them fell, and so had to give way to the victor. I next climbed up over the lichen-covered boulders of the Hrafnagjá on the opposite side of the valley and saw the great rift in the lava rocks with deep and icy water below, across which a noted chieftain, Flosi, famous in the sagas, is said to have leaped back to safety when hard pressed by his enemies ; the latter dared not risk the leap, so Flosi won the day.

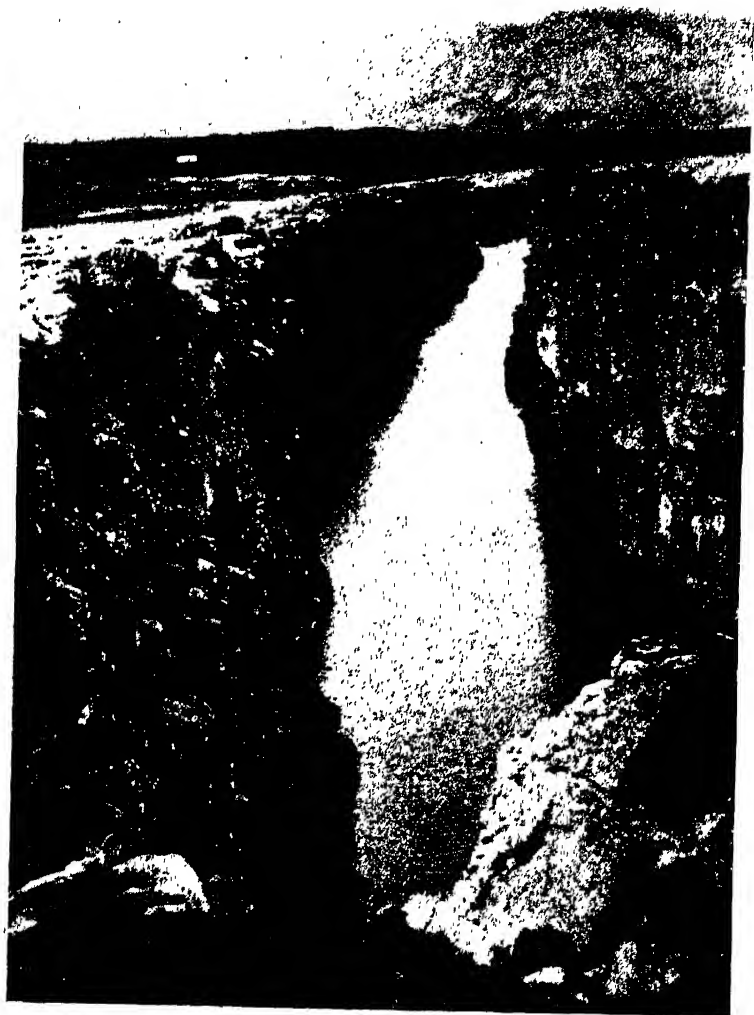
Returning to the Almannagjá, a further short climb enabled me to get a fine view of the beautiful waterfall of the Öxará, where the river dashes over a high ridge of rock down to the plain be-

neath. This fall is insignificant when compared with the giant falls of Gullfoss, Godafoss and Dettifoss, but in its way it is extremely fine and well worth attempting to see. Not far off was a dark and gloomy pool of great depth. It was at this sinister spot that in ancient days unfortunate women of immoral character, and also those suspected of practising witchcraft, were taken by the people and drowned, after being tied up half naked to the porch of the nearest church and beaten. It is difficult to associate the kindly Icelanders of to-day with their grim ancestors ; but, after all, their customs were no more barbarous than those of other countries in the Middle Ages, so allowances must be made !

As I climbed back up the steep road through Almannagjá I passed the remains of where once had been the booths of famous Vikings and poets ; they were marked by slabs of stone. The silence was intense. I had not met a soul during my walk, and consequently I was much startled at suddenly hearing the click, click of a hammer on the great wall of rock to my right.

To my amazement no one was to be seen. But soon the sound came again, the unmistakable ring of a hammer upon the bare slab of stone beneath which I was standing.

In Iceland there is a widespread belief in the



HRAFNAÐJÁ, THINGVELLIR

supernatural. Many of the country people declare they are able to see fairies and trolls; although they are, as a rule, extremely reticent on the subject. Could it be that I was listening to a fairy anvil? But, alas, for my romantic imaginings! A prosaic explanation was soon forthcoming. A cleft in the rocks on the side overlooking the valley showed me that far below, on the bank of the river, some workmen were busy erecting a little wooden hotel, and what I had heard was the echo of their hammers. I subsequently learned the interesting fact that, in the past when the lawgivers were speaking from the Lögberg near this point, the echo of their voices must have been heard far below in the valley for a considerable distance, the rocks in the background acting as a kind of sounding board.

I could have lingered for hours longer at Thingvellir, and I am not surprised at Lord Dufferin declaring in his "Letters from High Latitudes" that it is a place well worth going round the world to see; but a bitter north wind accompanied by a sudden squall of driving rain and hail drove me back over the bleak moor to the hospitable shelter of Kárástadir, where an appetizing meal of fresh salmon-trout from the lake, excellent coffee and a dish of the famous Icelandic skyr—a form of curdled milk taken with cream and sugar—awaited me.

and—so to bed. But I awoke at 2 a.m. to find the lake and the surrounding hills bathed in a golden light with the snow-capped crest of Hengill tinged with delicate rose from the rising sun. I could not sleep with such a feast of beauty before me ; instead I spent a happy half-hour sketching from my window.

CHAPTER VI

EXPEDITION TO GEYSIRS AND GULLFOSS

MOST visitors to Iceland, in addition to seeing Thingvellir, make an expedition to the famous Geysir group and the great waterfall of Gullfoss. This, together with an ascent of Hekla should the weather be suitable, constitutes what the Icelanders call "The Tourist's Round." As, however, I had already been several days at Thingvellir and had had the place completely to myself the whole time, I began to wonder if visitors to this spot were as frequent as I had been led to believe. I was told that the year was as yet young; it was only the beginning of June, and in another few weeks there would be several excursion boats landing at Reykjavík full mainly of Germans, Danes and Americans. They would land at Reykjavík and, during their few days in Iceland, would flock to Thingvellir in numerous cars and a battery of cameras would be levelled at Almannagjá. Some of the visitors would pene-

trate further inland as far as the Geysirs ; while others would attack Hekla. They would then return to their respective countries and declare they had " done " Iceland ; and if, during their brief stay, the weather happened to be unkind, they would add that the climate of the country was impossible and the sun never shone ! I heartily congratulated myself on the fact that I should be leaving the south of Iceland for the north by the time this unwelcome invasion might occur. Certainly for the time being I had the place entirely to myself, and I decided to make the expedition to the Geysirs and Gullfoss without delay.

The distance there and back across country from Thingvellir was, roughly, about seventy miles. I arranged with the farmer at Kárástadir for a couple of ponies for the trip, which he said would take me three days, and he added that as the way was long and difficult I should need a good guide whom he would be able to supply ; and all would be in readiness for me by 9.15 next morning. At 9.30 there was no sign of either guide or ponies, but I was still new to the country and had not learned that, if you wish to escape a long and weary wait before starting on an expedition in Iceland, your only hope is to give the time that you wish to start as an hour earlier than intended.



THE AUTHOR WITH TWO OF HER PONIES

If you do that, then and only then will you have some hope of getting off about the hour you wish.

At last to my relief a small boy—he could not have been more than thirteen—appeared with a couple of sturdy little ponies which he proceeded to saddle. I asked him where the guide was, but he could not understand a word of English, so I inquired of the farmer who had strolled up to us, and I was somewhat taken aback when, pointing to the small boy, he said :

“ *That* is your guide ! He is my son, Sigurdur.”

I felt a little doubtful, for the latter looked a mere child ; and, when his mother appeared on the scene and proceeded to kiss him good-bye, I began to feel that *I* ought to be responsible for *him* instead of *him* being responsible for *me* ! However, as I proved later, he was a wonderfully capable little lad, and fulfilled his rôle of guide with great efficiency. He had a smart new cap for the occasion—a present I imagine from his father, who had lately been to Reykjavík—and of this he was tremendously proud. Even if it happened to be raining in torrents, as frequently was the case during our ride, he would always on approaching a farm discard his sou’wester for the cap which he kept rolled up in the pocket of his oilskin coat.

It was 10.15 before we were ready to start,

Sigurdur at the last moment having to run back to the farm, for he had forgotten his knife, without which no Icelander would dream of starting on a ride across country—far less a guide !

We were to break the journey for the night at a little farm about thirty miles distant. This meant many hours in the saddle for, as we only had two ponies between us, we had to stop and rest them at frequent intervals. I was delighted to find that Icelanders show the greatest consideration for their ponies, which are always well fed and cared for. They are wonderful little animals, very sure-footed and often extremely fast going and I had the greatest admiration for the manner in which they would pick their way over rough and stony country, seldom if ever stumbling.

The day was fine to start with, but by noon stormclouds gathered and from then onwards it poured with rain relentlessly, and I was thankful for my oilskins. The latter (coat and trousers) are essential for the traveller who intends to ride across country, for he may be overtaken by heavy rain at any time, and Icelandic rain is like no other rain, especially when accompanied by a cold north wind. It may continue for hours or even days, and a complete set of oilskins and a sou'-wester is the only possible protection when riding through it.



THE OLD GRANDFATHER WAS VERY SHY

(p. 74)



OFF TO GULLFOSS WITH SIGURDUR

(p. 66)

After skirting the lake (Thingvallavatn) our track lay over bare and rocky hills strewn with lava, and then dipped sharply down into a wide plain with another lake and numerous hot springs in the vicinity. All around the ground appeared to be steaming from the numerous pools and streams of scalding water overflowing from these springs. This, combined with the dark and lowering sky, formed a scene eerie in the extreme.

At five o'clock I was beginning to get very hungry, having had no food since breakfast at 8.30 that morning, for the eggs I had brought with me for lunch had been under-boiled and had burst with disastrous results all over my haversack ! A cup of excellent coffee obtained at a farm we passed was doubly welcome and so were the delicious home-made biscuits and little cakes provided by the farmer's young wife. She and her husband stood over us while we ate, and they talked to Sigurdur, but of course I could not understand what they said.

On once more through blinding rain until my small guide was obliged to stop and ask his way of a passing countryman, for we had lost the track and had to cross a wide hill-side covered with dense scrub. We picked up the path again on the opposite side of the hill and after another hour or two, during which we had to ford several

streams, we came at last to my great relief in sight of the farm where I imagined we were to stay. My hands were numbed with the rain and wind, and I could hardly feel my feet, but my spirits rose with the pleasant prospect of a warm fire and possibly a hot meal.

No such luck, however. Sigurdur, who had been having a lengthy conversation with the people of the farm, returned to where I was hopefully waiting with the ponies and, after violently shaking his head, he pointed to where the track seemed to lead on indefinitely over more hills shrouded in heavy mist. My heart sank, but there was nothing for it but to jog along once more, and it was after eight o'clock when we finally reached our destination. The farmer's wife spoke a few words of English; she had big blue eyes and wonderful long plaits of corn-coloured hair. But at the moment I was beyond noticing anything except an arm-chair in the corner of the little sitting-room!

My hostess helped me off with my dripping oil-skins and led me to my room. It was outside in a wooden outhouse; the rain leaked through a hole in the roof, but the bed was in a dry corner. It was warm and comfortable; and, oh, the joy of sinking into it hugging my little rubber hot-water bottle! The farmer's wife brought me four

boiled eggs, quantities of black rye bread and butter and hot milk, after which I felt better and slept soundly in spite of the howling tempest outside and the torrents of rain beating against the window and on the corrugated iron roof of the shed.

The next morning it was raining as relentlessly as ever and looked as if it would continue. The mountains were shrouded in mist and dense banks of cloud. The ride to Gullfoss and back would be about fifteen miles, but having come so far I could not turn back now, so I put on my oilskins over my riding clothes, donned my sou'wester and, after a good meal of coffee, stewed lamb, gravy and potatoes—(green vegetables and fruit are unobtainable in Iceland)—I felt ready for anything, and so did Sigurdur. The ponies, who had also enjoyed a good night's rest and food, were in better condition than the previous day, and we trotted briskly off into the mist and rain.

We reached the Geysirs in good time, for the path was level over a wide lava covered plain, and our little steeds cantered a good part of the way.

The great Geysir, famous in the past for its magnificent eruptions, and from which all the other geysirs in various parts of the world first took their name, no longer gives performances.

Indeed, it has now been inactive for years. In 1916 a party of Americans visited the famous spot. Hearing that soap would occasionally have an exciting effect on some of the smaller geysirs in the group, stimulating them into temporary activity, they determined to watch the effect on the Great Geysir itself, and they threw into the basin sixty-six lbs. of soap. They were rewarded a few hours later by a sizzling and bubbling in the centre of the pool culminating in quite an imposing eruption; but that is the last occasion on which Great Geysir has deigned to perform, although a little geysir of the name of Smidur can quite easily be provoked to a small eruption if fed with two cakes of soap only. Unfortunately I had forgotten to bring a supply with me, so was unable to experiment.

The rain was still coming down in torrents when we dismounted from our ponies and gingerly picked our way over the hot and steaming ground, while a gusty wind blew clouds of evil smelling sulphur fumes in our faces adding to the awesomeness of our surroundings.

After passing several smaller basins of steaming water, we reached the wonderful circular pool of Great Geysir, twenty-five yards across, and famous the world over. It was brimful of almost boiling water, crystal clear and of an exquisite trans-

parent blue. The dry, encrusted, siliceous sides of this miniature lake shelved steeply down to a central cone or shaft of immense depth, from out of which rose countless bubbles that burst with a sizzling noise in the midst of the great cloud of steam that enveloped the basin. An awe-inspiring sight at all times, but especially so on this morning of lowering clouds, wind and rain; and I was not altogether sorry to turn my back upon it.

After resting our ponies, we continued on our way towards Gullfoss. The wind and rain beat in our faces as we rode over a desolate moor of sandy soil and lava, and it was bitterly cold. Sigurdur had some difficulty in finding the way. There was no path, but an occasional cairn marked our track, which all the while was gradually ascending into the cloud-wreathed hills beyond.

At last in the distance we could see a rocky ridge with a deep and precipitous ravine out of which burst a great cloud of spray. "Gullfoss," exclaimed Sigurdur, excitedly pointing in its direction. He had never been here before, so was as thrilled as I was myself. We dismounted from our ponies, left them contentedly munching grass, and climbed as near as we dared to the edge of the ravine, where we were rewarded by the magnificent sight of one of the greatest waterfalls in

the world. The mighty volume of water—a drop in the southern Hvítá river—came dashing down from the heights above in a series of rapids until it took the main plunge into the deep and narrow rift on the opposite side of which I was standing. The deafening roar of the water might well have equalled Niagara. One could hardly hear oneself speak, and if I had not already been drenched with rain I should have been drenched with the clouds of spray. In the sunshine this spray is a mist of rainbows that scintillate in a riot of colour over the ravine. Gullfoss means “Golden Fall,” for golden it is on a bright day, but this beautiful sight, alas, I was not to see, for the sun remained obstinately hidden.

Two months later, on August 16th, 1929, about ten miles north of Gullfoss, a great ice dam to the south of Langjökull burst owing to pressure caused by the rising water of the Hagavatn. This lake had been denied an outlet owing to the presence of ice from the southern end of Langjökull, and a remarkable new waterfall appeared near this point. An interesting account of the occurrence is found in the “Geographical Journal” of March, 1930.

After leaving Gullfoss, I decided to spend the second night at a different farm nearer home. It proved to be a very primitive little place and

several families seemed to be living there. Sigurdur explained to a tall, good-looking man—presumably the head of the house—what we wanted and, with a curt nod of his head, he silently shook hands with me and then called to his wife. She was a jolly, rosy-cheeked woman and, after helping me remove my dripping oilskins, she showed me into the bath-stofa with its invariable couch in the corner for use of the passing guest. As is invariably the case in the smaller farms, there was no guest room, and I slept on a couch in the parlour. The origin of the name “bath-stofa” is curious; its literal meaning is bathroom, and bathroom it was in the ancient days, for the Viking settlers discovering with joy the presence of so many hot springs delighted in warm baths, and in the centre of their sitting-room they used to sink a round basin of stones in the earthen floor into which they would pour the hot water from adjacent springs, thus frequently indulging in comfortable baths with their friends, something after the fashion of the ancient Romans. Although the best parlour in an Icelandic farm to-day is no longer the bathroom in a literal sense, the name has remained and it is always to the bath-stofa that the traveller is shown on his arrival.

My hostess succeeded in making quite a comfortable bed for me on the couch. After rummaging

in a small chest in a corner of the room, she produced a clean pillow case and the usual eiderdown duvet enclosed in a clean sheet. These she placed on the top of a pile of rugs, and soon I was tucked cosily up and indulging in the warmth and comfort after the long cold day in the rain.

The woman next brought me a jug of hot milk and home-made rye bread and butter. She stood for several minutes solemnly watching me while I ate, and then, with a cheerful "Góða nótt," she left me for the night.

A glorious morning of brilliant sunshine and a clear blue sky greeted me when I awoke next day. The air was like champagne, and it was indeed a joy to be alive! I made a sketch of the quaint old farmhouse to the great interest of an old man and several women and children; and later I persuaded them to pose for a photograph. The old grandfather in particular was very shy and refused at first to face the camera, but finally he did so, chuckling to himself the while, apparently much amused.

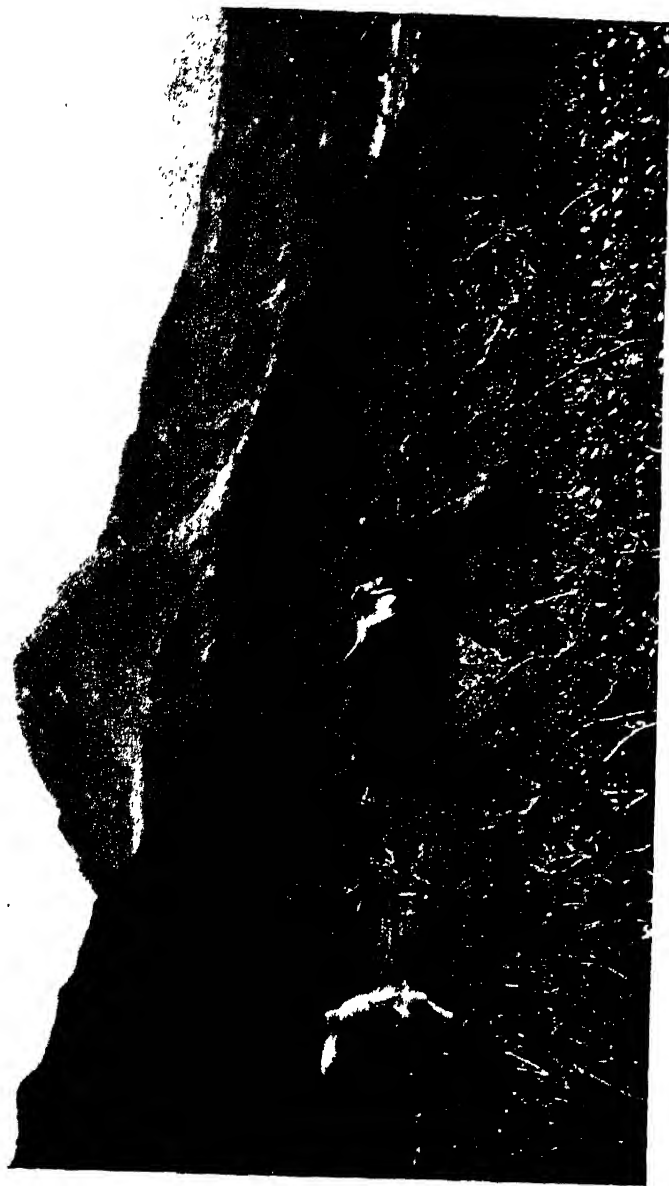
At ten o'clock I was told my meal was ready. It was laid for two on the table in my bedroom, and Sigurdur sat down to it with me. We ate in solemn silence, for my small guide, in addition to not understanding a word of English, was very shy.

An hour later we started off on our homeward journey, the sunlight sparkling on the newly-fallen snow with which the hills-tops were covered. After a while we reached the farm where we had stopped for coffee on the journey up. We found the farmer's wife about to set off with six ponies that she was taking along our route. She asked Sigurdur to help her with them ; and away we all trotted together. She herself rode a very fast pony with which she cleverly kept the others in line, something after the manner of a sheepdog. As my pony was getting a little tired, she signed to me that I should ride one of hers for a change ; and she lent me a splendid little animal with a fast gallop. On reaching a wide stretch of level moor, we all raced together, the ponies doing their utmost to beat each other. It was great fun, and I was quite sorry when about four o'clock we came to a labourer and some boys, and the woman said she would now have to leave us. She had evidently brought the ponies for the men, for they were expecting them. The labourer invited me to rest by his tent. It had started to rain again, and he covered me with a tarpaulin ; afterwards producing from out of the tent some delicious newly made pancakes which he offered me, and which I thankfully accepted. We all sat and ate together, and he tried to pronounce some English

words, and laughed very heartily at my attempts at Icelandic.

Then, the meal over, after the usual shaking of hands, Sigurdur and I continued on our way, finally reaching Kárastadir about 7 p.m. The farmer, his wife and the numerous children gave us a warm welcome, the parents relieved no doubt to see their son and his charge safely back, new cap and all complete !

A few days later I left Kárastadir, motoring back to Reykjavík in a freight lorry, for the modest sum of 3 Krónur. I had a seat by the driver in his little enclosed wooden box, and my luggage went on behind with several sacks, some scrap iron and three men ; the latter were very jovial, they sang songs and handed round peppermints to all, including myself. There was also an attractive little puppy which I nursed on my lap. The farmer's wife and some of her children came to the road to see me off. She gave me her photograph and some rosebuds off a little plant she had been trying to grow indoors ; and, with a sweet smile, begged me by realistic signs to write to her from England. I was quite sad to say good-bye to her, for the whole family had been so kind and hospitable. They could not do enough for me, and nothing was too much trouble.



THE BIRCH "FOREST" AT THÓRSMÖRK

THE MARKARELJÓT



CHAPTER VII

THÓRSMÖRK AND HEKLA

AT the extreme south of Iceland, between the glacial peaks of Tindafjalla-Jökull and Eyjafjalla-Jökull, runs a wild gorge through which flows the swift and dangerous Markarfljót, a river dreaded by the natives for its changing beds of quicksand. At the end of the gorge, whose mighty glaciers and great rocks of fantastic shape constitute some of the most magnificent scenery in Iceland, there is the surprising sight of a beautiful little dell with a small wood of stunted birch trees bravely straggling up the hill-side. This little oasis with its luxuriant, green grass and variety of ferns and moss is called Thórs mörk and is one of the loveliest spots in Iceland, but also one of the most difficult to reach owing to the treacherous Markarfljót, which must first be forded. I was told that it would be possible to motor from Reykjavík for a considerable part of the way, but the last five hours must be done on ponies. Hearing there was a little farm at the head of the Markar-

fljót valley, I arranged to spend a couple of nights there, taking a whole day for the expedition to Thórsmörk, the farmer himself undertaking to supply ponies and act as my guide.

I started off in the public motor from Reykjavík on June 18th. It was pouring with rain and the car was tightly packed with countryfolk bound for different farms along the route. Their baggage was tied on to every available part of the car; two great sacks rested on the mudguards and a packing-case was strapped on the radiator. I had a front seat beside the driver. It was very hard and the car appeared to have no springs. The road was one long series of bumps and pot-holes.

After crossing some bleak lava fields we climbed over the high and desolate ridge of the Kambar hills and down to a wide plain near the sea, where we passed the hot springs of Reykir. Through the mist and rain I caught sight of a flat stretch of ground from which slowly ascended numerous spirals of white steam. Had it been fine, I should no doubt have seen many of the women belonging to adjacent farms busy with their family washing, or perhaps baking their bread in a hole in the ground, which is sufficiently hot to be used as an oven!

About midday we crossed a bridge over the

Thjórsá river and stopped for refreshment at a little inn which supplied the usual skyr and coffee, also mutton hash. Then on once more until about four o'clock the apology for a road ceased altogether and we raced over a desert of fine lava dust. We were not far from Hekla ; but she was hidden by the clouds. Now followed several miles along a rough cart-track and we finally came to a standstill at a small farm. Here, with the exception of two women, all the passengers left us, mounting ponies that were waiting to take them to their various homes, some of them no doubt many hours distant. The car with my two companions and myself continued to bump and crawl slowly along the cart-track, which had a deep-sunk ditch on either side. Soon the inevitable happened—over we went, one of the back wheels sticking fast in the ditch ! Half an hour was taken up in extricating the unfortunate car and we managed to reach the end of the road without another mishap.

We now followed the dried bed of a river, splashed through several streams and finally stuck once more in the middle of a particularly wide one, with the water well over the axle. I climbed out with my two companions, and we splashed as best we could on to the bank while the driver and another man tried in vain to restart the car. At

last the women, who were bound for the same farm as myself, became tired of waiting and were carried on the men's backs over another part of the river, and from there, after waving good-bye to me, they started to walk up the Markarfljót valley.

By now I was getting a little weary, but fortunately it had stopped raining. The evening sunshine was sparkling on the glaciers towards Thórsmörk, and my spirits rose with the beauty of my surroundings.

At last a farmer came to the rescue of the driver. Together they dug away the mud from under the wheels, and finally got the car out of the river.

On again through some more streams and over a wide stretch of sand and stones, up to the little farm at the foot of the hills where I was to stay. I found the two women had already arrived. They were friends of the farmer's wife, and we all sat down to hot chocolate, cream and cakes while our hostess waited upon us herself.

I was then shown to my tiny bedroom, sunk below the level of the ground. Had I so wished, I could have stepped straight out of the little window above my bed on to the green grass outside. I was lulled to sleep by the music of a little waterfall that came foaming and splashing down the steep hill-side that towered up behind the



THE MARKARFLJÓT VALLEY

farm, and I knew nothing more till I was awakened by the farmer's wife early the next day. To my joy it was a beautiful morning of brilliant sunshine, with rolling white clouds chasing across the blue sky, and throwing purple shadows over the snow-clad peaks up the valley.

After a good breakfast of coffee, eggs and home-made rye bread and butter, I started off at 8.30 with the farmer for Thórs mörk. My pony was a splendid little animal and full of spirits ; it was all I could do to hold him in during the first part of the valley, where the going was level and we were able to enjoy a gallop. In addition to his own pony, the farmer took an extra one in case of emergency and his daughter also joined us, as she had never before been to Thórs mörk and was anxious to go too.

She was a jolly, rosy-cheeked girl and, like myself, she rode astride as do most of the younger women. The older ones still favour a quaint form of side saddle with an iron rail all round the back.

Unfortunately our conversation was very limited, as neither she nor her father understood any English and my little note-book of Icelandic phrases did not carry me very far.

After a few miles we picked up a local man who undertook to show us a safe way across the river, which at the time was very swift, being swollen

with the recent rain and melting snow. It does not flow down the winding valley in a single channel, but spreads out into many parts with flat tracts of sand and stony gravel between. A considerable time is thus taken in getting across. The water is icy cold as it comes from the glaciers, and towards evening blocks of ice are frequently carried along with it ; but the chief danger, of course, lies in the quicksands which are constantly shifting. No one can ever tell exactly where they will be, and a certain number of lives have been lost here in consequence. It is therefore essential to take a reliable guide.

After a couple of hours more riding, the flat and stony surface of the valley closed into a ravine with great mountain crags on either side crowned with eternal snow from which the glaciers streamed down. We now came to the first part of the river, into which the local guide and his pony plunged first, in order to test the places where he thought it would be safe to cross.

On one occasion he shouted and gesticulated to us as we were following him and we had to quickly swerve our ponies to the right ; apparently we had been very near the fatal sands.

At last we were safely over and the man left us, after shaking hands all round, and wishing us good luck, as unfortunately he could accompany

MY GUIDE TESTS THE RIVER BED FOR QUICKSANDS

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us no further. I wondered a little how the farmer would manage on the return journey, but he seemed a sensible sort of man, and it was no good anticipating trouble.

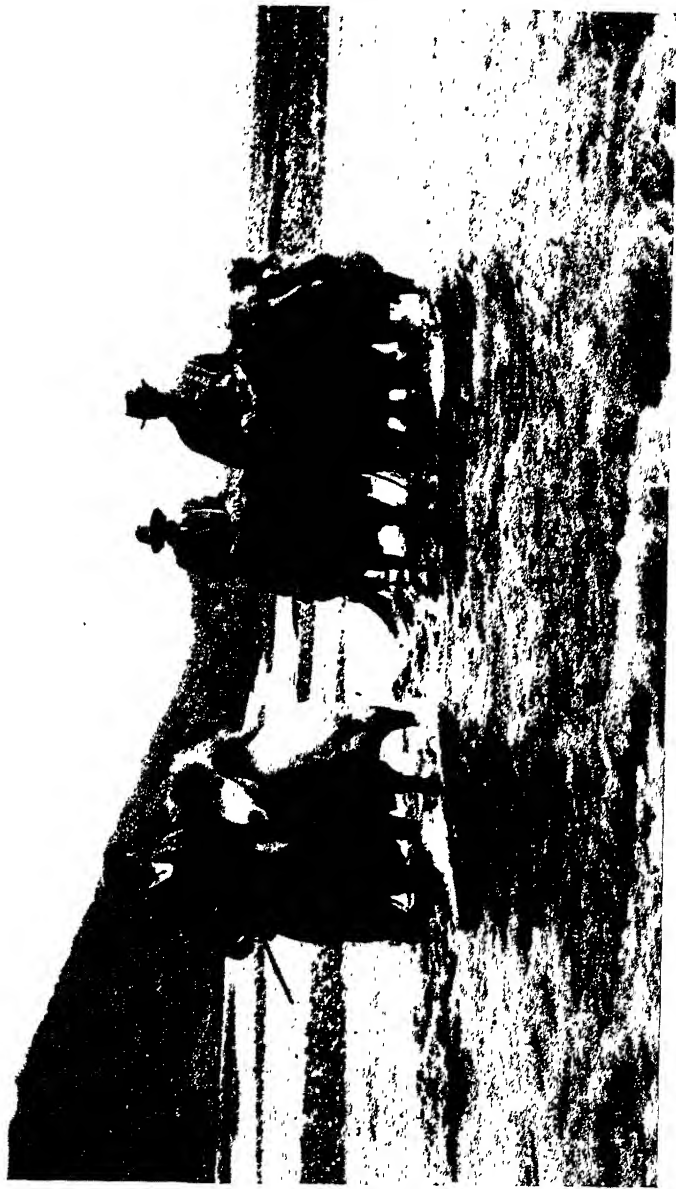
Our track lay right under the glaciers and through a narrow gorge between two ranges of snow-capped mountains. At the end of the ravine arose another magnificent peak with more glaciers. We ate our lunch of hard-boiled eggs and bread and butter beneath the shadow of some giant crags and finally reached the beautiful little wooded dell of Thórs mörk early in the afternoon. Here we enjoyed a welcome rest, lying full length on the soft, springy turf, and basking in the sunshine while the ponies eagerly munched grass.

The birch trees which grew thickly up the steep hill-side were for the most part very stunted, seldom over ten feet in height, but they are the only trees to be found in the south of Iceland, and the natives proudly call this spot a "forest.") The farmer's daughter became quite excited at the sight of the poor little trees and insisted on picking as many branches as possible and tying them on to her pony's saddle.

During our return journey heavy rain clouds gathered up and burst, and it was bitterly cold with an icy wind blowing off the glaciers. I put

on my oilskins and sou'wester, and the farmer insisted on lending me his mitten gloves to put over my own. He had some friends at a farm near his own, where we stopped at 7.30 for a welcome cup of hot coffee and the usual plate of home-made biscuits and cakes. This farm possesses a little garden of which its owners are very proud, for here are to be found a few more birch trees and quite a number of English flowers and plants. In spite of the driving wind and rain, the lady of the house insisted that I should thoroughly inspect the "wood" and garden, which accordingly I did, expressing my admiration as best I could under the uncomfortable conditions!

Before reaching here, however, we had had to recross the river. It took us the best part of an hour, for the farmer had to find different places for us to ford it, the beds of quicksand having shifted during the day. He would go on ahead with his pony to test the ground while I, meanwhile, waited with my heart in my mouth hoping he would not disappear! He then would return, take my pony's bridle, and together we would slowly plunge through the swirling water, his daughter following with the spare pony. How our little steeds kept their feet in spite of rolling stones and the swift current, I cannot imagine, but they



WE FORD THE MARKARFIJÓT

never slipped once and took us all safely to the opposite shore.

I was told afterwards that on occasions it is impossible to ford this river, especially when it is swollen with melting snow or after much rain. Travellers are very few and far between at any time, comparatively few visitors other than Icelanders attempting to see Thórs mörk, although it is one of the grandest bits of scenery in Iceland and well repays one for the difficulties that may be encountered.

I was greeted by brilliant sunshine the following morning, and at nine o'clock found I was the only passenger for the car that was to return with me to Reykjavík. I was given a warm send-off by the farmer and his family, and soon we were bumping along once more over sand and stones, ploughing through streams, and narrowly escaping sunk ditches. We reached the road with no mishaps this time, however, and found two Icelandic gentlemen in oilskins and riding boots seated on a raised bank apparently waiting for the car. We drew up and they both jumped in, settling themselves in the back seat after having politely shaken hands with me. I thought they were farmers, or perhaps sportsmen out for fishing, but found I was mistaken. One of the men spoke English exceedingly well and he explained that

both he and his friend were Members of Parliament, and were returning to Reykjavík after a political tour on ponies.

Shortly after, his friend was dropped at a farm where he had further business, and we picked up a countrywoman who also wished to go to Reykjavík. In addition, we gave a lift to an ancient man with a patriarchal beard, who was anxious to travel a short distance in our direction.

In Iceland the motor-car is common property, and no one is ever refused a lift should there be room.

The weather was, fortunately, clear as we neared Hekla; and, while racing over the bleak desert of grey sand that lies for miles in the vicinity, we got a splendid view of the snow-capped summit crowning her somewhat dismal slopes of lava.

Of all the volcanoes in Iceland, of which there are 130—many of them active from time to time—Hekla, 5108 feet in height, is the most renowned. She can boast of twenty-six recorded eruptions and many disturbances of a minor nature, the last taking place in 1913. The name Hekla means "hooded mountain," referring to the cap of snow on her summit.

For the last twenty-five years the famous volcano has been more or less peaceful, but she



ENJOYING A REST AT THÓRSMÖRK

may arouse to fury at any moment, and the danger signal will be a few thin, black streaks down her snowy cap. When Icelanders see this sign they will know what to expect and will hasten away with all possible speed, for it will mean that lava is streaming from the crater and an eruption is imminent. The worst one occurred in 1845. It lasted for seven months and thunder-like rumblings were heard two hundred miles away. Molten streams of boiling lava devastated the surrounding country, and the ashes which accompanied these streams as they were hurled from the crater are said to have been carried as far as the Orkneys, at a speed of twenty-four miles an hour. It is even stated that some of this lava dust reached the South of France, but whether that is true I cannot say!

The nearest farm in the direction of Hekla is Fellsmúli. It is possible to motor to this point, after which ponies must be employed should the traveller wish to make the ascent of the volcano. The climb is not a difficult one, and it is possible to ride up a large part of the way.

After leaving Hekla behind, we reached the Thjórsá river once more, and an hour or so later were back in Reykjavík, having first halted for a meal at the same wayside inn as before. My

parliamentary friend insisted on treating me to excellent barley soup and coffee during which we discussed politics. He told me that the present Icelandic Government is Liberal with a Socialist section. The seat of the Ministry is in Reykjavík and consists of a Prime Minister, a Minister of Industries, and a Minister of Finance. The Ministry is responsible to the Althing or National Assembly which meets for six weeks annually at Reykjavík, and which is divided into two Chambers consisting of thirty-six members elected by constituencies and re-elected every four years. In addition, six members are elected by the whole country for a period of eight years.

Great interest is taken throughout the country in politics, both men and women having an equal power to vote, but only after the age of twenty-five. Iceland was among the first nations in Europe to give women the vote. I gathered that, although she has her own government and is united to Denmark only by having the same King, there are many Icelanders to-day who hope for the time when their country will be entirely free and independent—as she was in ages past.

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CHAPTER VIII

I START FOR THE NORTH

ON my return from Thórsmörk I spent a further day or two in Reykjavík, during which time I made preparations for my journey round Snæfellsnes and up to Akureyri. The distance I should have to cover would be roughly between three and four hundred miles, and I imagined it would take about three weeks, allowing myself a few days' rest here and there for sketching. As I should be wearing riding kit continually, I decided to send my luggage round by sea on a mail boat to await my arrival at Akureyri, and to take nothing with me across country except two good sized haversacks, in one of which I could pack my sketching materials. Both haversacks could easily be carried by the extra riding pony that it would be necessary for me to take, and I could thus dispense with a pack pony.

On June 21st we had practically twenty-four hours of sunlight. The invaluable Stefán came to

see me in the morning with the welcome news that the "Sudurland," a small cargo steamer, was very shortly leaving Reykjavík for various ports round the west coast, and would be calling at Stapi, to the south of Snæfellsnes peninsula, in order to hand over mails and cargo. There was a little farm on the coast here where it would be possible for me to stay a night, and from which point I could ride back the fifteen miles along the coast to Búdir, where it was my intention to spend four days at another farm for painting, before starting on my journey.

Stefán had discovered a farmer who came from Búdir and was sailing to Stapi on the "Sudurland," and this man agreed to arrange for a guide and three ponies to take me from Búdir round Snæfells-Jökull to Stykkishólmur, a journey of five days. After that I should have to manage for myself; but, as Stykkishólmur was a good-sized village, no doubt I should find further ponies and another guide with whom to continue my way.

All sounded plain sailing and, in spite of the fact that Stefán still seemed a little doubtful as to how I should manage alone and with no knowledge of the language, I myself was in the highest of spirits and had no qualms whatever. That night he took me to see the "Sudurland" which



SNÆFELLSNES FROM STAPÍ

had already arrived in the harbour. We had to climb across some planks over the sides of three other small vessels in order to reach it. Accommodation appeared very scanty, but the captain, who was on board, told Stefán that he would promise me a berth if possible. The boat was due to sail in about three or four days' time at 10 p.m., and would probably call at Stapi about 6 a.m. the next morning, where I could be landed in a small boat that would be taking off the mail, etc.

These arrangements settled, I climbed back over the other boats, across planks and up and down iron ladders to the quay, where I stood for a while lost in wonder at the glory of an Icelandic night. It was nearly eleven o'clock, but the harbour was still bathed in soft golden sunlight, and away on the horizon, silhouetted purple against the amber sky, was the mountainous and rugged outline of Snæfellsnes, famous for many a romantic story in the sagas, and on whose wild, unfrequented shores I soon hoped to find myself.

Five nights later the "Sudurland" set sail. How happy and care-free I felt as I joyfully climbed up the gangway with nothing to cumber me but two haversacks, and all Iceland to explore—ready to face anything and everything!

My good friend Stefán saw me off, hurrying up

at the last moment with a further list of useful Icelandic phrases, which he thought might be useful when I wished to speak to my guides, or on arriving at farms. As a matter of fact, the little book proved invaluable, and I always kept it in my riding-coat pocket, so that I could produce it quickly in emergency.

Having waved good-bye to Stefán, I went below, and found the little boat was already packed to overflowing with Icelandic farmers and fisher-folk. I appeared to be the only foreigner. I then learned the disconcerting news that, as I had omitted to buy my ticket in advance, all available sleeping accommodation was now taken, even the seats in the little saloon.

Feeling a little chastened, I wandered out on to the deck, but it was much too cold to sit here, even enveloped in my oilskins. I was wondering what to do, and where I should spend the night, when the ship's mate took charge of me and, with many apologies for the fact that he had nothing better to offer, took me to the upstairs saloon which was very hot and crowded, and filled with tobacco fumes, and allotted me a bench not more than twelve inches wide, between the side of the ship and the stair rail that led below. I squeezed myself in as best I could, using my haversacks as a pillow, and except for the fact that I was able

to put my feet up I had a somewhat uncomfortable night of it. In spite of a calm sea the "Sudurland" pitched and rolled like a trawler, and I had difficulty in not falling off my narrow bench; but, apart from this, sleep was impossible as my companions sang and talked among themselves the greater part of the night.

About six o'clock the next morning I went on deck, and welcomed the cold fresh air after the stuffy saloon. I found we were just nearing the little creek of Stapi, behind which towered the beautiful and imposing Snæfells-Jökull, a dormant volcano over five thousand feet in height and crowned with ice and eternal snow. The Jökull, "Ice Mountain" as it is locally called, is the culminating peak of the long range of wild and varied mountains forming the great promontory of Snæfellsnes. On three sides, the Jökull appears from a distance to rise like a snowy pyramid from the sea, and is a landmark for many miles. In order to reach the north of the peninsula I should have to ride round the base of the mountain, a somewhat long and tedious business owing to the fact that the ground for many miles is covered with lava boulders, over which the ponies have to pick their way as best they can, there being no regular riding track, only cairns to mark the way.

The "Sudurland" anchored off the little creek

and I noticed that the coastline was very broken and jagged. A rowing boat now drew alongside. I was thankful the sea was calm, for the boat, which looked very old, already had a fair amount of water in the bottom. Beyond three country girls and the farmer who was going to Búdir, and who had promised to get me ponies, there was no one landing at Stapi. One had either to jump or be lifted into the boat from off the iron steps down the side of the "Sudurland." My haversacks were thrown in first and I followed, carried by one of the boatmen. At last we were all wedged safely in between a mail bag, a lot of sacks, and some timber that had been taken off the "Sudurland." It was impossible for the boat to land us on the beach, however, owing to the rocks, so the men waded and the women were carried ashore on the backs of the boatmen. I was glad I was small and a light-weight, for my fisherman carried me as easily as a feather, putting me carefully down with my haversacks on to some wet and slippery rocks.

The Búdir farmer kindly offered to carry my haversacks, and I followed him as best I could over the rocks and up a steep nullah, down which flowed a swift and bubbling stream. I had to cross this stream higher up by some very shaky stepping-stones. I expected to land in the water



A ROWING BOAT DREW ALONGSIDE

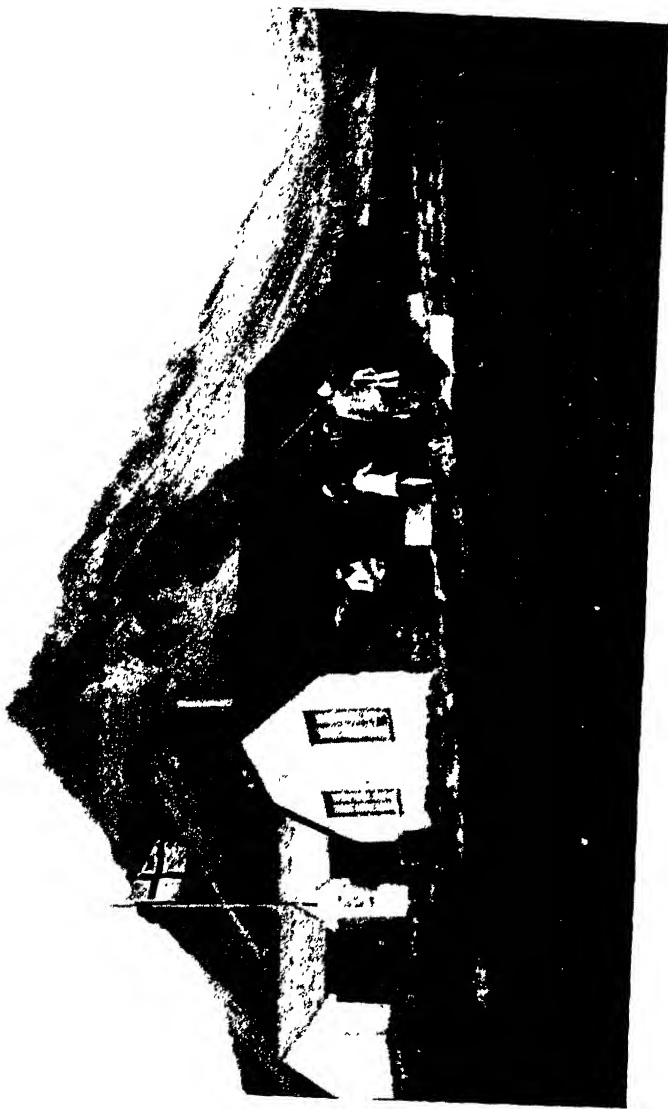
any minute, but managed to get across somehow, after soaking one boot. Now followed a climb up a very steep bank dotted with boulders, after which I came in sight of the farm. It was a primitive-looking little cabin built of wood, peat and lava boulders, with a corrugated iron roof. The front door led into a narrow passage, very dark, with an earthen floor, and walls built of peat and stones with tufts of grass growing in between. The entrance was so low that I had to stoop my head for fear of hitting the roof! My friend, the farmer, kindly inquired for me if I might spend the night there before riding on the next day to Búdir.

The woman of the house, who was regarding me with great interest and curiosity, understood no English, but I gathered that I was welcome to stay as long as I liked, although she could only offer me a sofa in the bath-stofa, as all the beds were occupied by her family. Thankful for small mercies, I accepted the somewhat hard and narrow sofa which my hostess did her best to make comfortable for me.

I was then introduced to the three girls from the boat, who evidently belonged to the house. One of them had been to school in Reykjavík, and understood a few words of English which she was delighted to practise on me.

At eight o'clock we all sat down to coffee and cakes, after which I tried to get some sleep on my sofa, but this was out of the question, for the farm at Stapi, like so many of these primitive and isolated little homesteads, is the proud possessor of a telephone. It was constantly ringing, and either the farmer, his wife, or one of the other women, and occasionally all of them together, would hasten in to answer it, continually repeating: "Ullo! Ullo! Ullo!" sometimes for as long as five minutes on end. Apparently receiving no answer, they would bang down the receiver until the next ring, when into the room they would all run again!

At eleven o'clock the table was set once more and we had breakfast, consisting of black unleavened bread, very moist and heavy, a sweet soup with prunes floating in it, and some excellent fish, with more coffee to follow. As the afternoon proved very fine with warm sunshine, I found a sheltered nook by the cliffs where I was protected from the cold wind, and once again tried to get some sleep. This time I was successful, and lulled by the music of the waves and the cries of the sea birds as they whirled overhead, I dozed for several hours, until I was fetched in at 3.30 for another meal of coffee and pancakes. At this rate, I thought to myself, I most certainly shall



THE FARM AT STAFF

not starve! The pancakes were excellent; they are a speciality of Iceland, and nowhere else have I enjoyed them so much.

Thoroughly rested and refreshed I went for an evening stroll, and before turning in for the night I made some sketches of the wild indented coast with its whirling flights of sea birds, and distant view of blue and purple mountains.

The next day I was greeted by driving wind and rain, and the mountains were shrouded in mist. I had intended to leave Stapl for Búdir where there was, I learned, a good farm, not later than 4 or 5 p.m.; but, although a message arrived from Búdir to say that horses and a guide would call for me by that hour, it was nearly 9 p.m. before they finally turned up. My one consolation lay in the fact that the rain which had come down in torrents all day had now ceased, so at any rate I had the prospect of arriving at my destination more or less dry!

Heavy banks of cloud hung over the mountains giving them a grim, austere appearance, and making the evening darker than usual. It was nearly ten o'clock by the time we got started, for the guide Jónsson, a handsome youth with curly red hair and bright blue eyes, had to have a meal and the ponies a rest before we could get away.

Our track first followed the coast up a precipitous cliff path with a sheer drop of a thousand feet or more on our right, down to the sea. We had to ford several streams which came foaming down from the hills above, crossed our path, and hurled themselves over the edge of the cliff in a series of sparkling waterfalls. Stapi has been compared to a miniature Giant's Causeway, owing to the wonderful basaltic columns of rock which are found around the bay and along the coast.

After a while the track dipped sharply down again into a wide and rich green valley where it was necessary to ford several more small rivulets. Looming eerily out of the mist on our left, and running parallel with the sea, was a great wall of mountains strewn with grey lava dust and fantastic crags.

At midnight, in spite of the clouds, it was still comparatively light and might have been nine o'clock on a summer's evening in England. Jónsson understood no English, so in silence we trotted our ponies through the night, stopping after a while to rest them at a tiny farm out of which ran a couple of men. After looking at me with great interest and curiosity, and inquiring of Jónsson who I was, one of them disappeared, returning in a few minutes with a welcome glass of fresh milk which he offered me, refusing to take

any payment. When at last we rode away, the men stood outside their door watching us and waving their hands, till we were out of sight.

About one o'clock my guide pointed out the Búdir promontory far ahead along the coastline, and soon after we passed one or two solitary riders, farmers I imagine. They stopped in each case to shake hands with us both, and to exchange snuff with Jónsson from out of the quaint bone horns which they all carried.

In the more remote parts of Iceland one seldom sees a man smoking; tobacco is too expensive, and the people—both men and women alike—take snuff instead, throwing their heads back and sniffing large quantities up their nostrils.

I gathered that the riders all inquired of Jónsson, with great curiosity and a certain amount of chaff, who *I* was! In other words no doubt using the Icelandic equivalent for: "Who is your lady friend?" His answer seemed to satisfy and surprise them and, after warmly shaking hands again, they would ride on, crying out: "Verid hér saelar!" "Be ye happy!" the customary greeting invariably exchanged between passing travellers. When a stranger accosts another in Iceland, it is considered polite to fire out a battery of questions: "What is your name?" "Whither are you bound?" "Whose son are you?"

Thus exhibiting a friendly interest ! I am speaking, of course, of the remote parts of the country where passing travellers are few and far between.

The last part of the way to Búdir lay over a wide marsh, very boggy in places and dotted with boulders. The ponies picked their way, seldom if ever stumbling, but I had an exciting moment when my saddle slipped half off and me with it, my pack behind having fallen sideways. Fortunately my pony stood still, so I clung on till Jónsson was able to help me.

It was nearly 2 a.m. when, very weary and sleepy, I reached Búdir farm. It was a two-storied wooden house, and I was shown upstairs to a bare boarded room with the welcome sight of a real bed in one corner. A good sized table in the centre of the room, a locked cupboard and one or two chairs completed the furniture. A smiling, good-natured woman bustled about putting clean sheets over the usual eiderdown bedding, and then hurried off to prepare eggs and bread and butter as if it was the most usual thing in the world for a stranger to turn up at two in the morning !

My guide meanwhile had also been shown into the room, and I wondered if he was expected to feed with me. When, however, I started to unpack my haversack, he solemnly shook hands, bade me " Góða nótt," and, to my relief, retired.



BÚDIR

(p. 100)

When I finally tumbled into bed, a watery sun was beginning to rise behind the mountains ; but, in spite of the light which flooded the room, I was soon fast asleep and knew nothing more till I was awakened by loud knocking, and the entrance of my host, the farmer. Seeing me still in bed, he beat a hasty retreat. I looked at my watch and found it was nearly midday, so no wonder he thought I would be up !

I spent the afternoon sketching and exploring the beauties of Búdir and its estuary. It was certainly the most beautiful place I had yet seen in Iceland. The outline of mountains round the coast was magnificent, while behind, away to the west, rose up the mighty snow-capped peaks of Snæfells-Jökull. Among the sheltered hollows in the dunés were grassy patches where I counted a variety of wild flowers, among them quantities of forget-me-nots and wild pansies of a lovely violet shade, patches of golden saxifrage and the delicate sea pink. Búdir is, indeed, famous for its flowers, of which there are said to be 150 different kinds, more than in any other part of Iceland.

I stayed in this beautiful spot three days, during which time I did as much sketching as possible ; but it was painting under difficulties, for there was a bitterly cold north wind, the weather was

stormy, and I was interrupted by frequent heavy showers which drove me indoors.

Returning to my room on one such occasion, I was surprised and rather embarrassed to find it occupied by a party of five men and women enjoying a meal of coffee and cakes. They had annexed all the chairs, removing my wet stockings and other garments which I had hung up to dry, on to the window-sill! I was so much taken aback and amused at this invasion of my bedroom that it was all I could do not to burst out laughing. On my sudden appearance the party all rose to their feet, having apparently just finished their coffee and, after having solemnly bowed and shaken hands with me each in turn, they trooped out of the room and I had it to myself once more, but not for long. A stout and talkative lady with a bad cold in the head arrived to stay for a few days, while waiting for a boat that was to take her to Reykjavík. She had all her meals with me and sat in my room most of the day. I finally came to the conclusion that my bedroom must be the only available guest-room and was therefore public property for any traveller who should turn up unexpectedly for a meal, or who wished to have somewhere comfortable to sit during the day, although I was sure of having it to myself at night!

The stout lady spoke a few words of English. She was amazed to hear that I was riding to Akureyri, never having been further than Reykjavík herself, and then always by sea. Another who showed great interest in my journey was the farmer's son. The latter spoke excellent English, having some years ago travelled abroad in a trading vessel, visiting many European countries and picking up several languages, English among them. He seemed surprised to hear that I intended to ride round Snæfells-Jökull.

"Nobody goes that way," he said. "Travellers always go round by sea. You are the first foreigner I personally have ever seen attempting this route. It is so much off the beaten track that most Icelanders would never dream of coming round, if they could help it. You *will* cause a sensation!" he laughingly added, "and the people you meet will be very surprised to see you here, but you will find them very kind and hospitable, and always good and honest."

Of that, I told him, I had no doubt, for I already had had experience.

Certainly the Icelanders, and I am speaking especially of those up country who have not been brought into contact with town life, are for the greater part the soul of honour, courteous to women, and completely unspoilt. There is no

crime among them and no police are needed. It is true there is a prison and a few special constables at Reykjavík, but the former is in little use except for persons who have been caught smuggling prohibited goods. An amusing story is told of a man who was charged with a trifling offence away up country. He was told to report at the prison in a week's time. This he obediently did, riding on his pony into Reykjavík, a three-days' journey. "We cannot attend to you at the moment," he was told, "but no matter, you can return in another week!" This the culprit philosophically did, serving a small sentence before returning to his home.

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CHAPTER IX

A RIDE ROUND SNÆFELLSNES

IT was midday on July 1st; the sun was shining with warm brilliance, a welcome antidote to the bitter north wind that was blowing off Snæfells-Jökull, the snow-capped peaks of which were silhouetted in dazzling whiteness against a deep blue sky. My haversacks were packed and I was waiting for the guide and the three ponies that were to accompany me for five days as far as Stykkishólmur. The Búdir farmer had been as good as his word, and Thóroddsson, the man he had found for me, proved an excellent guide and had the advantage of understanding a few words of English. I had seen him the previous day, and he had told me that his entire charge for the five days to Stykkisholmur, including the three ponies and his return journey with them to Búdir, would be 120 Krónur (about £5 10). As long as I was travelling in the more unfrequented parts of Iceland, taking local guides from

point to point, I found it possible to manage very economically; but, had I taken a professional guide and ponies from Reykjavík, my trip would necessarily have been an expensive one. There is a certain hazard, however, in travelling across country in this way, one cannot always be certain of obtaining guides and ponies, especially during the haymaking season. I took the risk and was particularly fortunate.

By one o'clock there was still no sign of Thóroddsson and his three ponies, although it was an hour after the time I had fixed. I was beginning to wonder if I should be fated to have another night ride, when there was a whirl of dust and flying sand, and up they galloped at breakneck speed to the farmhouse door. No matter how weary Icelandic ponies may be, no sooner do they come in sight of a farm, which usually means a halting place, than off they go at full gallop for the last few hundred yards. Sometimes it is almost impossible to hold them in. Having examined the ponies, all sturdy little animals—black, white and dun colour respectively—I was advised to ride the black one, the white pony carried the haversacks, and Thóroddsson rode the dun colour, who went by the name of Snorri.

I had a warm send-off by the kindly farm

people who showered blessings upon me, wishing me God-speed and a safe journey.

We took a different route back to Stapi from that by which I had come, shorter, but very rough going over ancient lava boulders and stones most of the way. In places this route was very lovely, for the lava was overgrown with moss and grass, and down in the hollows were emerald green ferns and quantities of wild flowers. Thóroddsson advised me to stop the night at a farm about an hour and a half beyond Stapi so as to shorten the following day's ride round the glacier, which would be a long and difficult one. Meanwhile, as my black pony proved rather slow, I exchanged him for Thóroddsson's steed, Snorri. The latter certainly proved the opposite to slow, indeed so keen was he that, on reaching a level stretch of sand near the sea shore, he took to his heels and bolted with me. Weak with laughter, I nearly fell off, but managed somehow or other to tumble back into the saddle and, after some while, succeeded in pulling him up without our parting company!

At Stapi we stopped for a cup of hot coffee and, after a bleak ride over a sea of lava with the Snæfell glaciers quite close on our right, the sea on our left and a piercing wind in our faces, we at last arrived between seven and eight o'clock,

at the isolated little farmstead where Thóroddsson had suggested we should spend the night. A small river from the glacier flows past it and out to the sea, making cultivation of the soil in the immediate vicinity possible. From a distance the lonely little house, with its small surrounding patch of green, looked like an oasis amid the vast desert of bleak and grey lava that stretched away on either side as far as eye could see.

I was numb with cold from the bitter wind, and at first the rather stuffy warmth inside the house was most welcome. The farmer's wife and three of her children with open mouths and eyes starting from their sockets came to the door and stared at me in wonderment.

Thóroddsson asked if we might have shelter for the night. "Já, já!" cried the woman, pulling herself together and ushering me upstairs, for the house was a two-storied one. She led me into what appeared to be the only occupied room. The others were empty and unfurnished. The one in which I now found myself evidently did service both for eating and sleeping in. There were three immense wooden beds placed end to end against the wall, a large table, some wooden chairs and the inevitable sofa. The windows of double glass, a precaution against the cold, were not made to open. As there was a big stove

alight the temperature was somewhat high. My hostess smilingly pointed to the sofa making signs indicating that it was to be my bed.

I confess my heart sank as I pictured a night spent in company with all the other inmates of the house both visible and invisible. At that moment in came Thóroddsson.

“Is it not possible for me to have a room to myself?” I asked him anxiously.

“No,” he replied, “they are very poor people. They have only one room,” adding cheerfully as an after thought, “but you can have the *sofa* to yourself,” as if that was all that mattered!

I then asked him where he was going to sleep.

“In there, I suppose, with some of the children,” and he pointed to one of the immense beds.

With a sigh I decided to be philosophical and pretend I was spending the night in a railway carriage; after all it would only be for once!

Luck came my way, however. Thóroddsson, noticing I appeared rather crest-fallen, had a long conversation with the húsmódir (lady of the house). The happy result was a room to myself after all. True it was cold and damp, being used as a workshop and full of carpenters' tools; but, after the floor had been well scrubbed and the sofa moved into a corner, it became transformed for me into a veritable haven, for at least it would

be mine, and mine only, for the night ! I tried to apologize to my hostess for all the trouble I was causing her, but she, kind soul, merely patted me on the back and hurried away to prepare a plate of porridge and hot milk, for there was little other food in the house. Meanwhile (the sofa was provided with a pile of bedding over which was buttoned clean linen;) but, alas, when the time came to go to bed, I found the latter was still far from dry having, apparently, been washed out for my special benefit less than an hour before !

For safety I slept outside the bed in most of my clothes with my riding coat and oilskins as a coverlet and a knitted jersey over the damp pillow. So sleepy was I, however, after the long ride in the cold wind that these minor discomforts did not worry me much. I could hear coughs, sneezes and snores proceeding from the next room, for only a thin wooden partition divided me from it; and, when I remembered I might have had to be in there too, I congratulated myself on my good fortune in being where I was and determined to make the best of it.

The next morning the húsmódir brought me hot coffee and cold pancakes, and also the luxury of a jug of hot water. It is rather difficult to obtain the latter at some of the farms. Most

Icelanders invariably wash in cold water and they think it very strange that one should prefer to have it hot. At 9.30 breakfast was provided for Thóroddsson and myself in the family room. It consisted of a weird concoction of some kind of wild bird cut up and mixed with a thick lukewarm paste. The bird was tough and I only managed to eat a very little, but fortunately there was plenty of hot milk of which I drank as much as possible, for I knew I could not get another meal until the evening.

Sandur, a little village on the north side of the promontory, was our next halting-place, but it would take us about eight hours to reach it, owing to the rough and difficult route we should have to follow. When at last, our frugal meal finished and the ponies saddled, we were ready to go, I tried in vain to persuade the farm people to take some payment for their kindness and hospitality, but (the five Krónur I offered were refused with smiles and thanks.) When one remembered that this sum would represent a considerable amount to these people, who were indeed poorer than most, it was all the more wonderful that they should refuse to take it. Apparently the novelty and interest caused by my arrival had been so great that all they thought of doing was to give me of their best with no thought of reward whatever.

Indeed, they would have been hurt had I insisted on giving payment. All I could do was to shake hands about a dozen times with every one, babies and children included, after which with many blessings and waving and shaking of hands the entire household watched me ride away.

It was quite the coldest day I had experienced in Iceland; a piercing north wind was blowing straight off the glacier and at intervals there were heavy showers of hail and sleet. The going was so hard that our ponies were forced to travel very slowly, picking their way over the lava rocks and boulders with which for miles the ground was strewn. The scene was bleak and desolate in the extreme. Nature in her most forbidding aspect. (This part of the country is uninhabitable, vegetation being impossible, and for hours we met not a soul, and there was no sign of life; even the wild birds seemed to have deserted this sinister spot.)

All day we plodded on, and I became very cold and hungry. As we rounded the Snæfells-Jökull and faced north, we got the full strength of the bitter wind right in our faces. I wound my woollen scarf round my head over my sou'wester, but even that proved poor protection; the wind seemed to cut through my oilskins and my fingers



CROSSING A LAVA DESERT

grew numb in spite of my thick Icelandic mitten gloves.

At last, after riding in this fashion for about eight hours, we came towards the sea, and there on the coast I saw the longed-for sight of the little fishing village of Sandur. As we rode through its one street we caused quite a sensation, heads popping out from every window and doorway.)

It was the first time I had come across anything like a road since landing on Snæfellsnes, and soon I saw an ancient motor-lorry crawling towards us. It was carrying fish. Instantly all our ponies took fright. Not one of them had ever seen a motor before, and they were simply terrified. I only just had time to jump off Snorri, who started to rear and plunge, and the next moment he was galloping madly away before I had been able to get a firm hold of him. Fortunately he was caught by some youths at the end of the little street, while Thóroddsson with difficulty succeeded in holding the others.

This excitement over, we inquired for night quarters and were received at a cosily furnished little corrugated iron bungalow. A kindly, rosy-cheeked woman, with three very pretty daughters, made quite a fuss of me, intimating that I would be most welcome, although she would not have

room for my guide, who could be given shelter elsewhere. She took me into the little parlour explaining that the sofa was all she could offer me in the shape of a bed, although I could have the room to myself during the night.

I gathered that this family was quite a prosperous one, for it possessed among other things a large gramophone, which the daughters turned on for my spécial benefit, while their mother provided me with excellent coffee and cakes served on a tray with dainty china cups and plates. I felt I was in clover and, after a good supper of fish and eggs, my kind hostess made up a most comfortable bed for me, giving me her best embroidered linen. The family bade me "Góða nótt" and left me to slumber, which I certainly did as soundly as the seven sleepers.

The following morning, soon after breakfast, I set off with my guide once more, our next halting-place a little farm some miles beyond the fishing village of Ólafsvík. My kind hostess at Sandur refused the five Krónur I offered, only with difficulty at last being persuaded to take three.

The morning was fine and sunny, the cold blizzard having mercifully spent itself. Our track followed the seashore for some distance with towering cliffs on our right and a distant view of mountain peaks beyond. We followed the coast,

in fact, all day, stopping for an hour and a half's rest at Ólafsvík, where Thóroddsson had some business. He took me to a little house in the centre of the village where friends of his, a charming mother and daughter, gave us delicious coffee and cakes daintily served with blue and white china. The daughter, who spoke English, told me that she had been to a big girls' school in Reykjavík, where there were a hundred pupils. Their English teacher, although Icelandic, had spent some years in Cornwall and so had a good knowledge of the language.

After leaving Ólafsvík and passing a quantity of salted fish spread out to dry on the shingle, an hour or two's more riding brought us to Brimisvellir, where we stopped at a small and isolated little farm among some dunes near the seashore. The farmer told Thóroddsson that his wife had ridden to Ólafsvík and would not be back until late in the evening, but he showed us into the sitting-room where I was at once surrounded by eight small children who followed me about with great interest, while an older girl brought me the customary coffee and biscuits.

Thóroddsson then explained that he had a sister living in another farm some miles on, where he should spend the night, returning for me by ten o'clock the next morning.

I let him go, and waited rather wearily for the return of the farmer's wife. Hour after hour passed and it seemed a very long time since my breakfast at Sandur! It was after midnight when the housewife finally rode up on her pony. The good soul hurriedly prepared some porridge and bread and butter; and, after rummaging in a chest in a corner of the room for clean linen, she made up a bed for me on the usual sofa.

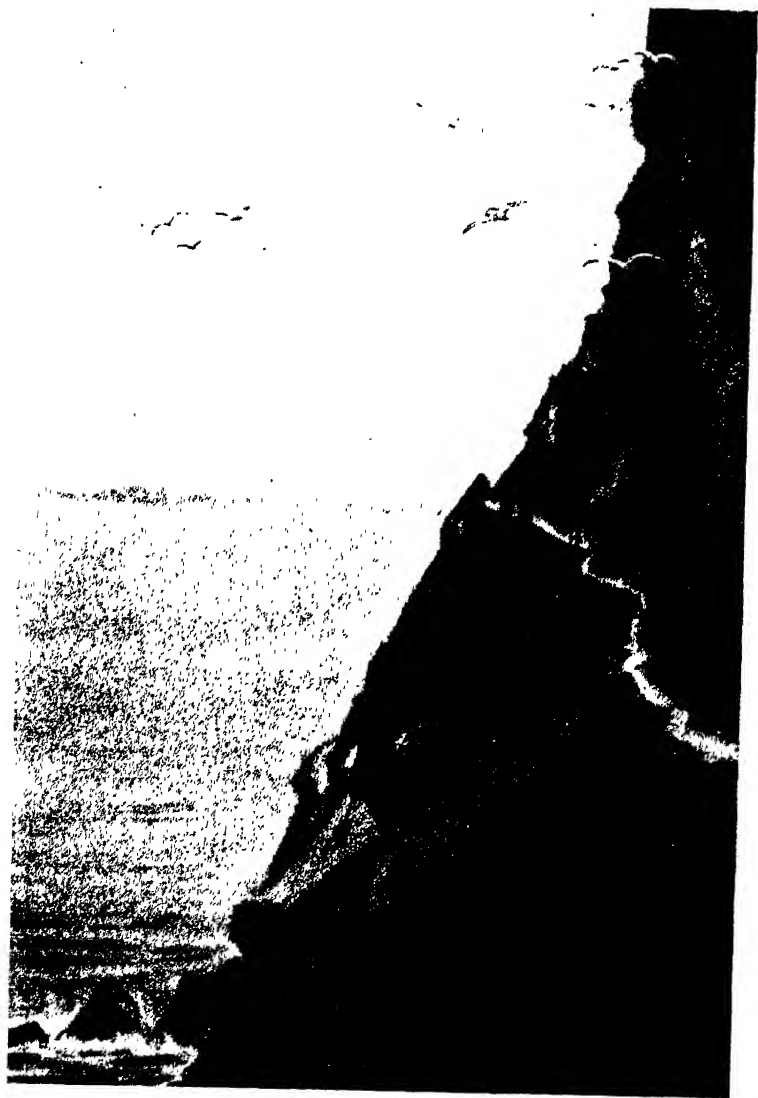
After consulting my little phrase book, I did my best to say in Icelandic:

"I am sorry to give you so much trouble."

For answer she merely slapped me on the back in a hearty manner and appeared quite to enjoy the novel experience of entertaining an unexpected visitor in the middle of the night!

The ride to Setberg next day was a very beautiful one. It was only sixteen miles distant, and I was able to take things easily and enjoy the scenery. The weather was glorious; a few fleecy clouds hung in filmy wisps around the summit of Snæfells-Jökull, a peep of which was still visible behind us, but they lifted later and all the mountain peaks were clearly seen against a bright blue sky.

We stopped for some coffee with Thóróddsson's sister, a sweet-faced girl with two small children. Her little house was very small but beautifully



BÚLANDSHOFDI

clean and fresh. The wooden walls of the sitting-room had been newly painted pale blue and were adorned with numerous family photographs and snapshots in frames. I noticed this was generally the custom in Icelandic farms. There was also a framed text with the Icelandic equivalent for : "God bless our home," beneath which was a quaint drawing of a stiff little house. After our coffee Thóroddsson introduced me to his father, a dear old man over seventy, who came to see us off, affectionately kissing his son good-bye.

After following the lonely seashore for some distance—where we rode in the surf—we reached the formidable headland of Búlandshöfði. Our track, which took us a little time to find, struck sheer up a precipitous wall of cliff that towered above our heads to a height of two thousand feet. The path, a mere ledge in the rock, wound steeply up the mountain side, while below was an awesome drop of many hundreds of feet to the sea. In places, the narrow track disappeared altogether, worn away by frost and rain ; and the ponies, picking their way in single file along the shelving side of rock, constantly sent showers of small stones hurtling over the precipice. I kept my eyes fixed steadily in front, and tried to forget the drop on my left !

To the east of the head is a big boulder, which Icelanders tell you to tap with your riding-whip, for good luck in crossing the treacherous pass.

There are many legends and stories in the sagas connected with this part of Snæfellsnes. Búlands-höfði figures in several dramatic tales, and of it is written : " The head is so high, that whatsoever leaps thereover must perish."

An amusing story describes how two farmers, father and son, who lived on opposite sides of the head, had a violent quarrel. One day, while riding, they inconveniently met here on the narrow ledge ; neither would give way to the other. On the leggings of each were silver buttons all down one side. Without a word to each other, the men flogged their ponies forward and somehow or other managed to pass, neither falling down the abyss ; but later each found he had lost all his buttons from one leg.

On rounding the point at the head of the pass and before dipping down to the shore, we were rewarded by a magnificent view of the sparkling waters of Grundarfjörður, a long estuary between the mountains, and we could see the curious basalt hills of Sukkertoppen (the sugar loaf) and Likkisten (the coffin), to give them their Danish names.

The remainder of the journey to the little parsonage of Setberg was a sheer delight. We

skirted the blue waters of the fjord most of the way. The ground was carpeted with soft green grass and moss, a pleasant change from the bleak stretches of grey lava of which we had experienced so much.

My welcome at Setberg is one of my happiest memories of Iceland. The little parsonage, with its tiny church adjoining, overlooks the calm waters of the fjord and a fine range of snow-capped mountains behind. Notwithstanding the fact that Séra Jósef Jónsson and his gentle, sweet-faced little wife already had three friends staying with them, they insisted on taking me in too, the pastor's brother sleeping on a sofa in the former's study so that I should have a bed.

The pastor's wife told me that her name was Hólmfrídur Halldórsdóttir (Hólmfrídur, daughter of Halldór). She explained that in Iceland, when a woman marries, she keeps her maiden name, calling herself daughter of —, whatever her father's name may be. In the same way a son calls himself son of —, his father's name. For example, Stefán Stefánsson (Stefán, son of Stefán). The six rosy-cheeked children of the house all shook hands with me and dropped little curtsies before we sat down, a party of nine, to the evening meal.

I was then shown to my dainty little bedroom

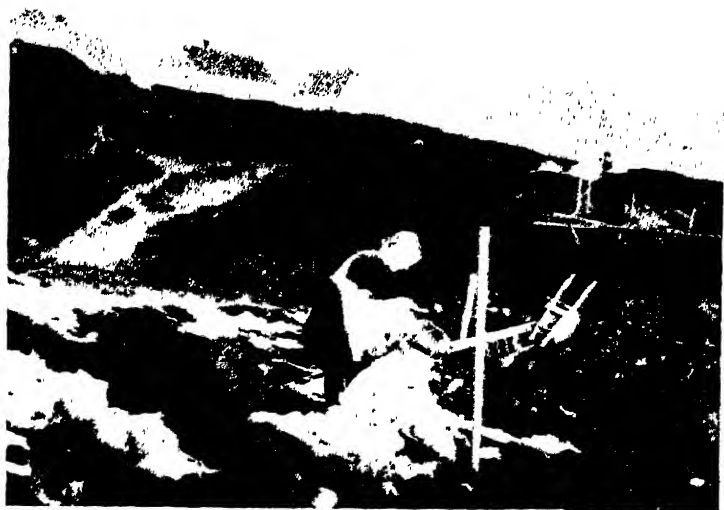
with its polished wooden floor, white walls and lilac coverlet. It was the first time for some while that I had enjoyed the luxury of a real bed and, needless to say, I appreciated its comfort to the full; but, before going to bed, I strolled out to watch the pastor and his children, who with some of the farm hands were busy sorting great piles of sheep's wool, which had been spread out to dry in the sun. This work was going on together with haymaking in all the valleys where there were farms. The wool is washed, dried and afterwards collected in piles, packed in big sacks and sent off to be sold to merchants who, in their turn, ship it to England, Spain and America, mainly to America. On my return from Iceland in August, in a freight steamer round the north and west coasts, we put in at eight little ports for the purpose of collecting this wool, and arrived at Leith with 3600 loaded sacks on board!

I stayed out till nearly 10 p.m. at Setberg, enjoying the warm evening sunshine, helping to sort the soft, clean wool and taking some photographs and sketches. An old woman, who was giving a hand with the wool, was very shy when she saw my camera, and there was much laughing and joking among the others when she quickly covered her head with her apron, but was "snapped" nevertheless!



RESTING THE PONIES

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SORTING THE WOOL AT SETHERG

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I shall always remember the peace and the beauty of that little parsonage so far from the busy world, and yet so happy and complete in itself.

The ride of forty miles next day to Stykkishólmur was both beautiful and interesting. After branching inland and skirting another fjord, we climbed by a steep bridle-path to the top of the hills behind Setberg, and out on to a wild plateau of lava, where I was rewarded by a glorious panorama.

To my left, far below, was the sea, to my right and in front the lava, which lay in great masses of rocky boulders covered with blue-grey lichen, giving the appearance of having been hurled here and there by the hand of some mighty giant.

Still further, beyond the lava, were the mountains, extinct volcanoes from whose craters it had doubtless been flung in ages past. Many of the highest peaks were covered in snow and the range looked very fine silhouetted against the sky and with deep purple shadows chasing their way along its undulating slopes.

After crossing the plateau we dipped into another green valley watered by a sparkling stream, and stopped for a rest at a tiny farm. We were shown into a sitting-room which also did duty as the family bedroom; three wooden beds

being ranged alongside the walls. A pet lamb, a sheep-dog and a small child kept us company while we enjoyed a meal of coffee and pancakes.

Towards evening we struck the first regular road that I had seen since leaving Reykjavík. It led to Stykkishólmur. Our dread now was the possibility of meeting a motor, and presently an old timber lorry came rumbling towards us. We hurriedly dismounted and led our ponies on to the grass off the road, but even so it was impossible to do anything with them till the driver stopped the engine: they kicked and plunged like wild things!

Fortunately we met no further cars till reaching Stykkishólmur, when another lorry came up behind us. Flinging ourselves to the ground, we wildly signalled to the driver to stop, which he did at once. Riding Icelandic ponies in the vicinity of motor-cars is no easy matter! For safety we led them through the village and up to the little hotel where Thóroddsson suggested I could stay, and where he took leave of me. He had been an excellent guide, and I felt quite sorry to part from him, to say nothing of his ponies, and especially cheeky little Snorri, of whom I had grown quite fond.



STYKKISÍÓLMUR

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CHAPTER X

FROM STYKKISHÓLMUR TO AKUREYRI

I FOUND the little fishing village of Stykkishólmur, with its bold and rocky headlands, numerous small islands and distant mountain views, a delightful spot in which to paint and rest for a few days before continuing my journey to the north. The vivid colouring of the red and orange rocks, the golden seaweed and the deep blue of the sea reminded me constantly of the Hebrides and the west coast of Scotland.

It was from this port that Eiríkr hinn raudi, or "Eric the Red," one of the famous Viking settlers, started off in 986 for the memorable voyage during the course of which he discovered Greenland, for whose colonization he was responsible.

Stykkishólmur, with its church, post office, and collection of little corrugated-roofed houses and shops, was full of life for so small a place and contained several cars and lorries, for it is possible to motor here now from Borgarnes. Beyond

two Icelandic business men, I was the only person staying at the inn. We had our meals with Jón Gudmundsson, the proprietor, and were waited upon by his wife, while a musical friend occasionally played the English National Anthem with variations in my honour! Gudmundsson, who spoke a little English, told me he had three good ponies and would be able to let me have them as far as Bordeyri, a three days' journey. He himself would be able to accompany me and act as my guide.

On July 8th we set off for the seventy odd miles ride to Bordeyri; my pony, Reyk, was a treasure, in splendid condition, and so keen that the slightest pull on the rein would send him off at a gallop. He belonged to Mrs. Gudmundsson and was evidently a great pet of the family.

We followed the coast more or less to Breidabolstadur, where we put up at an excellent farm accustomed to taking in travellers.

The following day, towards evening, brought us to a little lake at the foot of the Haukadalur pass. It was a solitary and beautiful spot, and we asked for shelter at a tiny cottage, the only one in sight. A dear old couple welcomed me warmly. They had no food ready at hand, but their son took his rod to the lake and presently returned with some fine salmon-trout.

For the first time I was worried by midges, the air by the lake-side was nearly black with them. Up to now I had not seen one, and had come to the conclusion that they were not nearly so numerous as I had been led to expect.

The next day it rained without ceasing from the moment of our early start to our arrival at Bordeyri in the evening. Had it not been for my oilskins, gum boots and thick Icelandic stockings, I should have had a miserable time, but they kept me perfectly dry in spite of an eight hours' ride in the driving wind and rain. Unfortunately the mountains were shrouded in heavy mist, so I saw nothing of the fine view I should have had when crossing the Haukadalur pass.

We stopped for hot coffee at a lonely little farm before we began the ascent. The farmer, who had visited Scotland and the Wembley Exhibition in London, understood a little English in consequence, and gave me some Iceland moss for luck. It was bitterly cold at the top of the pass and a descent into a fertile valley was a great relief.

We passed a wonderful cañon through which a river dashed down to the valley below in a series of miniature waterfalls. The water had literally carved its way through the rock, leaving great walls on either side.

We reached Bordeyri, consisting of half a dozen

little houses and a general shop, at the end of a small promontory in Hrútafjörður, about 6.30 that evening. The ponies had carried us splendidly, my little Reyk, who hated to be behind his companions, continually sprinting on ahead full of go and energy. We rode up to what I took to be a little thatched farm, but my guide informed me it was the Bordeyri Hotel!

I had now completed nearly two hundred miles since leaving Stapi, and was about half-way to Akureyri. Gudmundsson explained that I would have to cross the fjord by a ferry-boat. I then might get a lift for fifty miles or so to Blönduós in a public motor, as there was a road on the other side of the fjord. After he had explained to the woman of the inn that I wanted a room, he promised to telephone to Borgarnes asking that, if a car should be passing on its way to Blönduós, it might stop and pick me up. Gudmundsson had been a most helpful guide, and I parted from him and the ponies with real regret.

A couple of days later the Bordeyri ferryman rowed me across the fjord and helped me to carry my haversacks up the opposite bank to the road, at the side of which was a solitary and cheerless little stone house. Since the departure of Gudmundsson I had found no one able to understand a word of English, but by means of signs and the



THE BORDEYRI "HOTEL."

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BÓLSTADAHLEÐ

(p. 135)

aid of my little note-book I had gathered that a motor-car from Borgarnes would be passing along the road at five o'clock that evening on its way to Blönduós, and that a seat had been reserved for me.

It was now seven o'clock, and I was still hopefully waiting in the cold bare room into which I had been invited to sit, the woman of the house having told me that she had received a telephone message saying the car would be late. Truly one needs the patience of Job when travelling in Iceland! At eight o'clock the woman ran into the room gesticulating and waving her hands. Passing the door was a small closed car already tightly packed with countryfolk. I wildly signalled the driver to stop. He obeyed, but, shaking his head, tried to make me understand that he had no room. I was in despair and had visions of being stranded for several days, passing cars being very few and far between. Determined to get in somehow, I made up my mind to accept the offer of one of the passengers to sit on his knee, for I felt I simply could not face the possibility of being held up indefinitely in this desolate spot, and possibly missing my boat at Akureyri! A man had just tied on my haversacks to the back of the car and I was trying to squeeze myself inside, when the woman ran out of the house and,

seizing my arm, began shaking her head and talking very excitedly. I was completely at a loss as to what she meant, until I noticed the driver with a broad grin kept repeating "Annar bíll! Annar bíll!" and it dawned upon me that possibly there was another car. Seeing I was beginning to understand, the woman cried "Já, já, já!" and dragged me back with her into the house, showing me her watch and pointing to nine o'clock.

As a matter of fact the other car turned up by 8.30, and, to my relief, I found there was a seat reserved for me next to the driver. Gudmundsson had not failed me after all. I was indeed thankful I had waited for its arrival and had the benefit of a comfortable seat to myself, for the drive of nearly four hours to Blönduós was one long series of the most appalling jolts I have ever experienced. It was as bad as being on board a ship in a rough sea! Frequently we were only able to crawl along at four to five miles an hour. They call the track along which we bumped a road, but in places it was neither more nor less than a very rough cart-track and often worse than that! The unfortunate car had to plough its way through deep ruts and holes, from time to time forge through streams, and on one occasion cross a river by a perilous bridge which consisted of some planks laid casually across.

We did not reach Blönduós, a little hamlet on the north coast, until long after midnight, for although the distance from Bordeyri was under fifty miles it took four hours owing to the difficulty of negotiating the "road." The driver was wonderful, and as careful as possible not to jolt us more than necessary. The car itself was one of a series of American cars, mostly Buicks, that are specially designed for use in difficult country such as Iceland. They have a couple of extra springs and are built particularly strong in every way, but in spite of these precautions I was told that they only last two years at most. The life of an ordinary car would be finished in one such journey as that to Blönduós. In spite, however, of the misery of motoring in Iceland, wherever there *are* such things as attempts at roads—and as yet they are still very few and far between—the people make use of the cars for travelling to a large extent, for they are of course quicker than the horses, and luggage can conveniently be packed on behind and, indeed as is often the case, in front as well.

There was only one other passenger in the car besides myself, a young Danish zoologist, who told me he was on a walking tour collecting insect specimens for the museum at Copenhagen. He was the first traveller I had met across country

since the beginning of my journey, and I was glad to find he understood a few words of English.

When we finally drew up at the little wooden hotel at Blönduós, I was indescribably weary. It was after 1.30 a.m. when, refreshed with hot milk and biscuits, I sank into bed. My room was merely screened off from the adjoining one—where I had been given supper with the young Dane—by a curtain pinned casually across with a safety-pin, and shortly after, just as I was dropping to sleep, I was roused by the trampling feet of four big men, belated travellers who had to be given a meal. I could not see them of course, and fortunately they could not see me, but sleep was impossible, for the men talked and ate and shifted about in their creaking chairs for a full hour before, to my relief, they were shown upstairs to their rooms.

I slept well on into the next day and awoke to find a howling gale and rain.

The proprietress, with many apologies for my interrupted night, came into my room to tell me breakfast was ready. She led me through the sitting-room into the dining saloon, a big, bare, boarded room where a table was laid for ten persons. I was the only woman present, the remaining nine were all men, including my friend, the zoologist. Somewhat to my embarrassment,

my place was laid at the head of the long table, and all the men, after politely bowing to me, remained standing till I was seated. I was relieved to find sitting on my right a son of the British Consul at Reykjavík, and on my left was a brother of the pastor at Miklibær, a farm on the way to Akureyri at which I hoped to be able to stay a night. Both these men spoke excellent English, as did also several of the others, who were business men on their way to Akureyri. They had heard I was an artist and were very curious to hear my impressions of Icelandic scenery. They also showed the keenest interest in my journey and plied me with eager questions : " What, an English lady with no knowledge of the language riding alone across country round Snæfellsnes ! Surely, it was a very courageous thing to do ! Icelanders always avoided that route if they could. It was much too rough. Why had I not gone round by sea, and had I no regular guide ? Well, it was certainly cheaper and better to employ local ones, but how could I always be sure of obtaining ponies, and was I going to ride all the way north to Akureyri and beyond ? Why not wait for a bill ? When the weather was not too bad a car was able to get along the route from Blönduós as far as Akureyri."

I asked if the road was as bad as that from Bordeyri.

"Ah, much worse than that; the road from Bordeyri is quite a good one compared to that which goes to Akureyri."

"Then nothing will induce me to attempt it," I replied. "Can I get ponies and a guide here? I much prefer to ride."

"It would be better if you could obtain them from my brother's farm at Miklibær," said the man on my left. "He has many horses and will, I'm sure, gladly hire you some if they are not too busy carting the hay. I am on my way to visit him and am now waiting for a car that will drop me there on its way to Akureyri. You had better come too. I expect there will be room."

As this seemed the most sensible thing to do I agreed, although I cannot say I relished the idea. At seven o'clock that evening there were five of us still patiently waiting for the car that should have arrived at five. Besides myself there were the pastor's brother, an Icelandic business man, the zoologist and, to my surprise, an Englishman whom I had not noticed before. He proved to be a commercial traveller in the textile trade on his way to do business in Akureyri.

He told me that on other occasions he had always travelled round by sea, but this time he

thought he would try the experiment of getting across country by car along the main post route from Borgarnes.

"I little knew what I was letting myself in for," he added ruefully.

News now reached us that the car had stuck in the mud and could not arrive till eight o'clock. It had been coming from the Akureyri direction and had got into difficulties on the mountain pass this side of Miklibær.

They said another car coming from Akureyri was also stuck there. This seemed to bear out the truth of what I had already heard—that the road to Akureyri was worse than anything that could be imagined!

About seven o'clock the unfortunate car, badly battered and with the mudguards broken, arrived, but in such a deplorable condition it could not proceed with us. It was finally arranged that we should take another car that was really due to return to Blönduós, for a short distance, until we should meet the other one that was coming from Akureyri, and which apparently had now been dug out of the mud. We should then change into this car and our own would turn back to Blönduós with the Akureyri passengers, while we proceeded in theirs. There was some doubt as to whether we should get over the pass, and it

was suggested that we might have to get horses from a farm at the base and ride part of the way. The poor Manchester man, who had never been on a horse in his life, looked very alarmed at this prospect. He was not dressed for travelling across country, and in his thin walking shoes, bowler hat and black overcoat, would certainly have felt very uncomfortable on an Icelandic pony !

Finally about 7.30 we packed into the car—a powerful Buick—and, armed with a spade to dig us out of the mud if necessary and with chains on the wheels to prevent skidding, we started, hoping for the best ! The rain had stopped, but heavy clouds predicted more. It was impossible to travel quicker than eight or ten miles an hour, and for some while we bumped along at this pace along a rough cart-track. Soon we came to a broad valley between high mountains ; here we ploughed over the grass itself with merely a couple of ruts made by other wheels to guide us. We then plunged through a river. I felt certain we should stick in the mud on the opposite bank, but no, the driver accelerated and we clambered through somehow or other. The track now led up the mountain-side on our left. It was very narrow and there was a steep drop to the valley below on our right. I felt, as we bumped and heaved along, that we must sooner or later bounce

over the edge. No one spoke much at this point, but each had his own thoughts, no doubt along the same apprehensive lines !

At this spot, just where the road dipped down again to the valley, we saw crawling up towards us the other car, a small four-seater. We met and it seemed impossible for either to turn. We all got out and the passengers in the new arrival said they had been stuck for two hours, and finally had to walk quite a distance. Somehow, I cannot think how, the cars managed to pass each other and turn, and then my companions and I wedged ourselves into the other one. Three of the men squeezed into the back seat with some of their luggage and my haversacks, and I was squashed between the driver and the pastor's brother. The driver said he could not possibly get over the pass with so many passengers, and I decided, whatever happened, I would stop at the foot of the mountains for the night and then try to get horses and a guide from the farm there and ride to Miklibær by the next day.

We soon reached this farm, Bólstadahlíð, where the others had agreed to stop for a meal. The farmer was out, and his wife rather dubiously said I could not have horses as they were all busy with the haymaking and there was no man free to act as guide. I showed her a letter of introduc-

tion which Stefán had given me for use at farms. Soon after, her husband arrived and, to my relief, after reading the letter, he smiled very amiably and said :

“ Yes, it shall be arranged and you can have a room for the night.”

We all had a jolly meal of eggs, skyr, hot milk and meat sandwiches ; and then, after saying good-bye to my companions and wishing them luck on their perilous journey, I thankfully retired to a little attic with a clean but hard bed in which I slept dreamlessly. The next morning the farmer, a remarkably well educated man who spoke excellent English, told me he would have three of his horses ready to start on the journey to Miklibær by ten o'clock, and he himself would act as my guide.

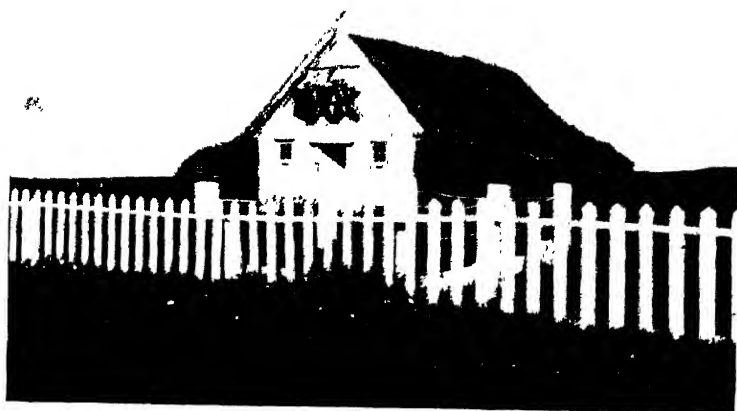
I had a very slow and heavy-going animal to start with, so suggested I should make a change. The farmer was dubious as to whether I could manage his own pony, which he assured me was very fast, but after a while he let me try it. I managed him quite easily and he was certainly a great improvement on the other, which, in addition to being slow, had a habit of shying at intervals all the way.

We followed a track which led for twenty miles over a magnificent range of mountains. With the



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exception of a few showers, the weather was bright and sunny, and the atmosphere so clear that one could see for an astonishing distance. This clarity is indeed a feature of Iceland, occasionally it is possible to see a line of hills on the horizon a hundred miles away, and I have never seen in any other country more exquisite effects of transparent light and shade.

The top of the pass was bare of vegetation and the going somewhat rough, over sand and stones. I noticed the print of a motor tyre, and could hardly believe my guide when he told me that this was no other than the "road" to Akureyri. More than ever did I congratulate myself that I was on horseback and not in a car!

From here the track wound steeply down to the beautiful Hjeradsvötn valley, emerald green with its shining river winding away towards the sea, which I could faintly distinguish far away to the north.

Nestling at the foot of the hills down which we had come was the interesting old church of Víðimýri. This tiny kirk, built of peat and stones with a grass thatched roof, dates from a very early period and is said to be one of the oldest churches in Iceland. The door was open and I found an interesting altar painting inside. Many of the high wooden pews were stacked

with sheep's wool, put there for shelter during the rain.)

We reached Miklibær about seven o'clock, after crossing the Hjeradsvötn. This river is now bridged. Formerly a ferry was employed, as it was considered too dangerous to ford. I had a warm welcome at the little parsonage, an old wooden farmhouse with picturesque gables and a thatched roof. Séra Lárus Árnasson, the young pastor, and his smiling, rosy-cheeked wife with her fat baby, had already been told of my pending arrival by the brother and were expecting me.

The next morning they showed me the church, close to which is the grave of the well-known British traveller, Mr. Howell, who was drowned some years ago while fording the river close by. In the little church is an interesting seventeenth-century altar piece of the Last Supper. It was given to the church long ago by Oddur Gílasón; in connexion with whom there is a weird story. He lived at a neighbouring farm, and one day, when coming to the church across the valley, he disappeared and was never heard of again. It was generally believed that the ghost of his maid-servant, who had committed suicide for love of him, and whose dying petition to be buried in consecrated ground he had refused, never ceased to haunt him, and finally spirited him away.

I found the pastor an exceptionally interesting man. He was evidently a great reader and, among his large collection of books, I was surprised to find several English ones, including works by Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Oliver Lodge. He told me that he had been a pupil of the late Professor Nielsson, who had helped to prepare many young men for the ministry, himself included.

Séra Árnasson then told me that he was obliged to go away on business for the night, adding that he was extremely sorry not to be able to hire me ponies and a guide to take me to Akureyri, but his men were all busy with the haymaking. He suggested that I should wait till the following day, when he and some other clergy were going to Akureyri for a conference. They had arranged to hire a car from Blönduós, and no doubt could find a corner for me. My heart sank at the prospect of motoring along the impossible looking bridle-path that I could see winding its way over the hills up the valley. But there seemed no help for it.

I spent most of the afternoon helping with the hay. Haymaking time is very important in Iceland, for the number of ponies and sheep which a farmer is able to keep during the winter depends largely upon his stock of hay which he uses for their fodder.

The pastor's wife and her brother-in-law had ridden off to a farm some miles away to take coffee with some friends. On their return we all had supper together and then, while the sun shone upon a golden evening, bathing the lovely valley in glory, I energetically did some more hay-making. To my joy, a farmer, who was helping with the others, offered to supply three ponies for the rest of my journey, which he said would take a couple of days. A young man whose name I think was Magnússon, a native of Akureyri, and who had been at the farm at Miklibær on a visit, offered to be my guide. With the exception of a word here and there they could neither of them speak English, but the pastor's brother acted as interpreter.

My spirits rose in leaps and bounds, for it looked as if I should be able to ride into Akureyri after all, and if my luck held I ought to reach it on July 17th, a day sooner than the date on which I had roughly calculated I ought to arrive when I had planned out my journey three weeks before. The fates had been kind indeed, for everything so far had gone according to plan.

We sat in a circle among the sweet smelling hay while the price of the ponies and the wages of the guide were discussed. Magnússon wished to know if I would be afraid of fording a rather

difficult and swift river, to which question the pastor's brother replied :

" Oh, no, she is not afraid ! The farmer from Bólstadahlíð told me that she rides the ponies not at all like a foreigner, she rides like an Ice-lander ! "

At which compliment I felt extremely gratified !

It was a glorious morning of brilliant sunshine when I set off at ten o'clock for the long ride of forty miles to the little farm in the valley of Oxnadal, where I was to break the journey to Akureyri. My pony was a piebald, slow and heavy going. It was rather like riding a miniature cart-horse. Magnússon's pony was even worse, so I was forced to keep to my own. My kind and hospitable hosts bade me good-bye, wished me good luck for the rest of my journey and watched me until I was out of sight.

The day's ride, although tiring, was a very beautiful one through grand mountainous scenery all the way. With the exception of a quaint old farm where we stopped for a glass of milk at eleven o'clock, we passed practically no others for hours on end, our route leading over wild passes with no habitation of any kind, our only companions the wild birds, whose plaintive eerie notes one heard from time to time. I was par-

ticularly struck during the whole of my journey across Iceland by the tameness of the wild birds, especially the golden plover. They had no fear; in the remote parts of the country human beings are so rare, they are not regarded as enemies. The birds would frequently perch on a rock close to the riding track till we were right upon them, they would then fly a few yards further on to another stone, from which quite unconcerned they would examine us with interest.

For the first time since my arrival in Iceland I felt the heat, and was forced to discard my riding coat and roll up the sleeves of my woollen jumper. Towards the end of the valley, I saw trotting briskly towards us, amid a cloud of dust, two horsemen with a guide and several spare ponies. They were the first travellers riding across country whom I had met during my journey, and I guessed them to be Scotch. Had they realized I was English, no doubt they would have stopped and exchanged a few words; but undoubtedly they took me to be Icelandic, for as we clattered past each other they raised their caps and called out the customary greeting "Saelar!" to which I replied in the vernacular. Their mistake was quite natural, for Icelandic women are not always fair-haired and the younger ones often wear European riding clothes.

Soon after this little incident we came to a steep pass at the foot of which was a very swift, although in parts fairly shallow, river. Magnússon, who was in front holding the spare pony with his own, turned round and asked me if I would be all right—at least that is what he intended to say, but not knowing how to express himself in correct English, he said instead, “Will you be good?” I grasped his meaning, however, and cried, “Já, já!” laughing to myself the while. We then plunged into the swirling water. My pony was splendid: stones were whirling past his sturdy little legs, but he bravely battled on, and I found the best plan was to keep my eyes fixed steadily in front on the tails of the others and not to look down at the foaming torrent of icy water which was splashing over my legs. Had I slipped in, I should probably have been swept away by the current into the deep part of the river where rescue would not have been easy. However, we all got safely across and another little adventure was over.

My admiration for the Icelandic ponies grew still greater with further experience. These wonderful little animals appeared indifferent to danger of any kind—motor-cars excepted! Before I left Iceland they had carried me in safety up and down bare faces of rock, over blocks of lava, up precipi-

tous mountain paths often no wider than a ledge, through streams and bogs, across rivers and over vast sand deserts.

By six in the evening, after crossing a steep pass with a fine view of two small glacial mountains, I was somewhat tired and hungry, having had no food all day except my early breakfast. We still had many miles to go, and soon, after dipping into the valley of the Öxnadal, the river of that name had to be forded. This livened things up a bit. The river of glacial water was wider than the other and just as swift. We got across with no misadventure, although for a moment or two my pony seemed to be making no headway against the force of rushing water which swirled under him, but he recovered and battled gamely through.

A little lower down the valley they are building a bridge over this river, so by next year travellers will be able to cross it with ease. Indeed, in a few years' time practically all the big rivers in Iceland will no doubt have been bridged, which to my mind will make trekking through the country less interesting, for a spice of danger always adds a certain amount of zest! We were now passing along a narrow valley with mountains each side and a range of magnificent soaring pinnacles on our left, one of them pointing upwards like a

finger to the clear evening sky. The landscape was bathed in tender colours of mauve and blue, gold and violet, but for once all I thought of was food and bed !

At nine o'clock we ambled slowly up to a farmhouse high up on the mountain-side. Hay-making was still in busy progress, but the farmer left it and came to greet us, asking what we wanted. To our anxious inquiries as to whether we could stay the night, he replied :

“ Já ! ”

“ Have you eggs ? ”

“ Nay.”

“ Fresh fish ? ”

“ Nay.”

“ Porridge and milk ? ”

“ Já ! já ! ”

I was so faint and tired, Magnússon had to lift me from my pony. I staggered into the little sitting-room and sank on to a very hard unyielding sofa, but it might have been the softest bed in the world so luxurious it felt to lie down flat and to rest my head upon a cushion !

After porridge and hot milk I revived ; the farmer then pointed to another room curtained off.

“ My wife and family sleep in there,” he said, and then he looked at the hard sofa on which I was resting.

I hastily explained that I was quite willing to sleep on the sofa, but at this his wife, who had been busy behind the curtain, appeared. She understood no English and, after they had consulted together for a moment, she beckoned me behind the curtain and showed me a bed with a snowy pillow case and sheet inside which was buttoned the usual duvet.

"You will sleep *there*," she proudly said.

"But where will you and your husband sleep?" I asked.

"He will have the sofa, and I shall have the floor with bedding on it."

In vain I expostulated at this sort of self-sacrifice, but no, the kindly folk would have their way—another example of Icelandic generous hospitality!

I was too tired to sleep very much; moreover, the light outside was so exquisite that I continually wanted to look out of the window.

At 3 a.m. the great range of jagged pinnacles on the far side of the valley was tinged rose pink from the rising sun and the whole landscape was bathed in a soft golden light almost unearthly in its beauty, while the crag—which reminded me of a finger—seemed to point upward to heaven itself.

At eight o'clock next morning the good house-



ON THE ROAD TO AKUREYRI

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wife brought me coffee and thick bread and butter, which I ate with relish, and at 10.30 she had ready a substantial meal of sandwiches, salted fish and a delicious Icelandic pudding, a sort of custard eaten with sugar, cream and nutmeg.

It was another glorious day and, after having said good-bye to my kind hosts, I set off at a brisk trot, my goal nearly in sight. At last we left the mountain ranges and glaciers behind. The track turned into a more or less passable road winding up the face of a grassy hill until, from the top, I saw far below in the valley the deep blue waters of an estuary, flanked on the other side by further mountains capped with snow. As I looked eagerly ahead, I could see where the mouth of the estuary reached the sea, and I realized that I was near the far north coast. Soon—a milestone—and with a thrill I read “20 kils. to Akureyri.” Two hours more on the road and there, nestling in the hollow on the shores of the blue estuary, was a small wooden and corrugated iron town, Akureyri at last! I rode up to the little Godafoss hotel and was shown to the luxury of a real bedroom once more, with a comfortable bed, a hanging cupboard and—joy of joys!—I learned there was a bathroom!

CHAPTER XI

TO GODAFOSS, MÝVATN AND NÁMASKARD

AKUREYRI, with its collection of gaily painted wooden and corrugated iron houses and shops, is the second largest town in Iceland. It is built at the head of the beautiful Eyjafjörður, which winds its way between the mountains on either side for a distance of thirty or forty miles to the sea.

The population of the little town has greatly increased during the last twenty-five years and now numbers between three and four thousand inhabitants. The Danish and Icelandic mail boats and freight steamers call here regularly, generally stopping for a day or two in order to unload or take on cargo. The "Brúarfoss" in which I had arranged to sail back to Leith was calling here on July 28th and would probably leave the following day.

Having ten days to spare, I decided to make an expedition to the wonderful volcanic region around Mývatn and, if possible, to visit the



EYJAFJÖRDUR, NEAR AKUREYRI

boiling springs and active geysirs of Uxahver, south of Húsavík.

I received much help in planning out this journey from Mr. Arthur Gook, an English non-denominational missionary, who has lived for over twenty years in Iceland doing much work among the people, and who has now been given the post of British Consul at Akureyri. He told me he knew of a reliable guide with good ponies who would be glad to accompany me on the expedition, on condition the doctor gave him permission, for he was recovering from the effects of a broken leg. I thought this sounded rather dubious, but, as Mr. Gook said that the man was that morning taking his family for a trip to the end of the valley, in a car belonging to a friend, and had invited me to go too, I thought I would accept the invitation and thus be able to see for myself what he was like.

At 10.15 round came the car and I packed myself in. We were ten person all together! Six children, the guide, his wife, the driver and myself. We had lemonade and biscuits on the hills, and afterwards played "catch as catch can." At least, the guide could not run, for he still limped badly. I saw it would be out of the question to take him with me on such a long expedition as that which I had planned, for the distance there

and back would be about 176 miles, and I had only six days to do it in.

After a while the children became tired of playing games. We drank more lemonade, and their mother offered me cigarettes, and also snuff from a little engraved box. I laughingly refused the latter, whereupon she took a pinch herself and gave some to the children.

On the way back to the hotel we passed the Akureyri Horticultural Garden, supported by the Government, and very well tended. Here were some mountain ash (practically the only ones in Iceland) and some small birch trees; also numbers of flowers, including both English and Icelandic poppies, pansies, lupins, phlox, forget-me-nots, sunflowers, button daisies and roses. Akureyri, in the far north, is one of the very few places in Iceland where flowers seem to flourish out of doors, and I noticed several little private gardens which were a galaxy of colour.

The following day I received an invitation from the guide to take coffee at his home; two of the children called for me to show me the way. The family lived in rooms at the top of a wooden house near the quay. Another guide, Thorstein, also recommended by Mr. Gook, had been invited to meet me there.

Over six feet in height, broad shouldered, with

blue eyes and thick tawny hair, he was certainly a fine specimen of humanity. But, rather to my consternation, he could not understand one word of English, not even "Yes" or "No." I decided, however, that I had picked up enough Icelandic to be able, with the aid of my little book, to manage, and as he was able to supply good ponies I fixed things up with him and agreed we should start in a couple of days. He told me he would prefer to take four ponies, for we should have to travel quickly.

Feeling all the better for my few days' rest, in which I enjoyed some sketching, I started off early on the morning of July 22nd for the eight hours' ride to Ingjaldsstadir, a farm near the great waterfall of Godafoss, and the first stage of my journey to Mývatn.

It was a fine hot day, but unpleasantly windy with clouds of dust. Mr. Gook called for me at the hotel to see me off and to show me the way to the horses' shelter and rest-house, where Thorstein was waiting with the ponies. This rest-house is a large stone shed which was given to the town some years ago by an American millionaire who loved horses, and was sorry for the poor little Icelandic ponies who frequently, on arriving after a long journey—often miserably cold and tired—had to spend the night wandering in the

street with no shelter. The kindly act of this man in building the horses' shelter in Akureyri has earned him the warm gratitude of the people, and also, surely, that of the ponies he loved so well.

On arrival at the shelter I was surprised to find Thorstein awaiting me with six ponies instead of four, as he had said. He explained to Mr. Gook that he was taking one of them to a farm beyond Ingjaldsstadir, and the other he wished to exercise. We thus trotted off a regular cavalcade, throwing up clouds of dust from the hard, dry road which we had to follow until we had crossed a bridge over the end of the fjord. Occasionally ice-floes from Greenland gather in this firth, but this does not often occur, except in the spring.

After reaching the opposite side of the fjord, we struck a steep bridle-path over the high mountain ridge which runs parallel with the water. We then dropped down into a narrow and beautiful valley, famous for its forest of birch trees, which grow along the banks of the sparkling river that flows down the centre of the glen. With the exception of the trees found at Thórsmörk, in the south, this wood is practically the only one in Iceland.

In the past, it is said, many of the valleys were thickly wooded with birch trees, but the Vikings



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had them all cut down for fuel and timber, and neglected to plant others. Consequently Iceland is a treeless country.

Having rested for a while in the welcome shade of the wood, we continued our way up the Ljósavatn valley, skirting the shores of its beautiful lake, until about 6 p.m. we reached the famous falls of Godafoss, or "Gods' Force." Seldom have I seen a more magnificent sight. Although not quite so big as Gullfoss, this waterfall is in its own way nearly, if not quite, as impressive. The River Skjálfandafjót foams and dashes over a steep ridge of basalt rock down into a gorge below. It has often been compared to Niagara. Frederick Howell describes it thus :

"The fall is semicircular in shape, and in the centre is divided by a rocky islet. To the right the stream descends in one main sheet, while the portion on the left is further split into a series of falls among some rocks, which the swirling shingle-laden waves have hollowed, undermined, and tunnelled into forms of wild grotesqueness." *

I climbed over the slippery rocks as near to the falls as I dared, and took some photographs before riding on to the comfortable farm at Ingjaldsstadir, where Thorstein suggested we should spend the night. I found the midges a little troublesome

* "Icelandic Pictures."

here, a foretaste of what I expected at Mývatn, the meaning of which is "Midge Lake."

I had heard awful tales of the midges occasionally appearing in a great black cloud, completely enveloping one and making it almost impossible to see ahead. When this happens, the ponies often become maddened and dash into the lake.

The farm people were busy working in the fields when we arrived at Ingjaldsstadir; a boy and girl were loading a couple of ponies with hay, the latter being slung across the animals' backs in large bundles, one on either side. Where roads are nil, a cart is out of the question, and the hay must be carried in this manner.

The farmer hurried to meet us, and called to his wife and daughter to prepare a meal. Unlike the majority of Icelanders, he was small, dark and excitable; possibly a descendant of the early Irish settlers. Occasionally one meets types such as this in the country, but not often, the majority are tall, fair and rather silent.

It is a curious fact that the two opposite natural characteristics of Iceland, her glaciers and her volcanoes (ice and fire), are undoubtedly reflected in the different characters of the people. For instance, the cold silent Norse nature, slow of action and never to be hurried, represents the glacial type, whereas that of a fiery and excitable



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THORSTEIN AND THE PONIES

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temperament, more akin to the Celtic, represents the volcanic type. The latter are far less common than the former, although I came across several people of this kind, the farmer at Ingjaldsstadir being an example.

Early the next morning, the pretty, golden-haired daughter of the house gave us an excellent meal of mutton hash, fried potatoes, Icelandic jelly, skyr, and a whole jug of cream. Thus fortified, we set off for the long day's journey to the geysirs of Uxahver, and up the Laxá valley.

It was a glorious morning. Hot sunshine, tempered by a cool north wind, and a cloudless blue sky. The ponies were in splendid form, my little animal breaking into a gallop whenever possible. He had the peculiar action of many Icelandic ponies, half trot, half canter. So long as one sits tightly to the saddle, this pace, which is very fast, can be extremely comfortable. It certainly was so in this case; for, no matter how many hours I had been riding, I felt no fatigue whatsoever.

The four spare ponies followed without being led. They were very good, as a rule, in keeping to the track, but occasionally some distant grass would tempt them away, and off they would canter, Thorstein being obliged to gallop after them, brandishing his long Icelandic whip in

order to round them up, and drive them back on to the path. At these times I had the greatest difficulty in preventing my pony from following the others, and sometimes I fear he got the better of me !

After leaving Ingjaldsstadir behind, we climbed over a mountain ridge and down to the other side. Here, after fording a river and crossing over some lava, we reached, on our right, the entrance to the beautiful Laxá valley. The river of that name comes rushing down a narrow cleft in the rocks at a terrific speed, and then drops in a series of foaming cascades to a lower part, passing underneath a somewhat frail wooden bridge, over which we had to lead the ponies. Below, to our left, the river wound away across a vast plain, at the far end of which was a range of snow-capped mountains and glaciers, dazzling white against the clear sky. To the north, on the far horizon ahead of us, was a long silver streak, which I recognized as the sea. Before turning up into Laxárdal, we struck north towards the coast, and the geysirs of Uxahver, which are found south of the little port of Húsavík.

On reaching the summit of another high ridge of volcanic rock, up which we had to find our way as best we could, the riding track becoming obliterated at times, we looked down on the other



UXAHVER, A GEYSIR IN ERUPTION

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THE GROUND WAS IN A CONSTANT STATE
OF TREMOR

side upon a sight so weird that I find it hard to give an adequate description. Here was a wide valley with the appearance of a vast smoking cauldron. Clouds of white steam were coming out of the ground in all directions, and in the centre, near a solitary little wooden cabin, were the geysirs, two of which at intervals were sending up spouts of boiling water to a height of twenty or thirty feet.

We followed our track down into this steaming valley, where it led between two sunk ditches full of hot water and up to the little house, which was built quite close to the largest of the geysirs. The basin was full to the brim of boiling water over which hung a cloud of steam. At intervals of about twenty minutes the pool would become very troubled in the centre, popping, sizzling, and throwing up countless little bubbles. The next moment an eruption would occur, a spout of water being flung up to a considerable height, and then overflowing the sides of the basin.

The ground all round had been drained and cultivated, vegetables being planted by the people at the farm. Apparently the hot water and sulphur deposit help to fertilize the soil.

I stood as near to the edge of one of the geysirs as I dared, and succeeded in obtaining some photographs of an eruption, but was forced to

jump back immediately afterwards to escape the scalding water as it overflowed.

On the hill-side behind the geysirs were some sulphur beds, of which, beyond Mývatn, I was shortly to see many more.

After coffee and cakes at the little farm, which latter was continually enveloped in clouds of steam and sulphur fumes, we rode back to Laxárdal and turned up its beautiful valley.

Evening was approaching, painting the hill-sides golden and tinting the shadows with blue and purple. We followed the river all the way. The going was rough, up and down over steep and craggy moorland, with bog in places and many streams to ford. I was thankful I had taken the precaution of providing myself with a midge veil, for I found these little pests rather trying. Thorstein assured me, however, that this was *nothing* compared to what we might find at Mývatn, for it was just the worst time for the "mý" as he called them, although if the north wind continued to blow we should not be much troubled.

About 8.30 we reached Halldórstadir farm, perched high up on the hill above the river. I was welcomed by a charming Scotch woman, who had married an Icelander thirty-five years ago and had lived here ever since. She was

quite excited at my arrival and told me that, with the exception of an English sportsman who had stayed the night four years ago, I was the first British traveller she had seen or spoken to for ten long years!

She made me very comfortable, giving me a dear little bedroom, and a delicious supper of Scotch porridge, eggs, scones and home-made jam, to which I did full justice.

It appeared that three different families shared the farm, which was a large one. A party of five men and girls were just starting off for a night ride and a picnic up into the mountains.

The next day, July 24th, the weather was again perfect. By a stroke of luck the north wind continued, and I was told I could safely go on to Mývatn, for the dreaded "mý" disliked a hot sun and a north wind, and consequently would not bother me much.

When my hostess brought me hot toast and scones early the next morning, she told me that three of my ponies had run away in the night, in spite of being hobbled, and were temporarily lost. Apparently the midges had been too much for the poor little beasts, and they had wandered off up into the hills in order to try and escape them.

It was nearly midday before Thorstein, to my

relief, finally returned with all the runaways. In the meanwhile I had spent a delightfully lazy morning, reading in the hay-field and basking in the hot sun.

The ride to Mývatn was most interesting and varied. First we had to ford the broad Laxá river, the biggest by far that I had attempted to cross in this way. It was unpleasantly swift, and in places the water came up to my saddle. Just as we reached the middle of the river, my pony stumbled on to his knees. I clung on desperately while he mercifully recovered himself without falling right down. Unaware that we should have to ford this river, I had, for the first time, discarded my rubber riding boots for shoes and long pull-over stockings, consequently I got very wet! Meanwhile the spare ponies, who were being led across by Thorstein, got their leading ropes tangled and became very excited. He was forced to return with them to the bank. My pony, of course, insisting on following, and this time I did not dare to thwart him!

Our second attempt at fording the river was successful, and fortunately my wet shoes and stockings were soon dry again from the effects of the hot sun.

The track now led over the mountains above Laxárdal, and after a steep climb the scenery under-



CROSSING LAVA NEAR MYVATN

went a sudden and dramatic change, for we found ourselves on a vast sand desert. It stretched for miles, and we took two hours in crossing it. Thorstein wore goggles, and I was forced to wear glasses too, for the ponies kicked up clouds of dust as they cantered along, and it was difficult to see ahead.

Beyond the desert the land in places became green again, and we rode across an ancient lava bed with picturesque moss-covered boulders, and a copse of stunted birch trees and shrubs. Then a wide stretch of more recent lava, bare and desolate, until, below, we came into view of the beautiful green encircled lake of Mývatn, gleaming silver in the sunlight with its background of volcanic mountains, tinged red and yellow from the sulphur fields.

The circumference of this lake is said to be about forty miles, but it is so indented with little promontories and projecting reefs that it is difficult to measure. Salmon-trout and char are very plentiful and there are quantities of wild duck, wild swans and other birds. Several little islands, green with luxuriant grass and angelica, are reflected like splashes of emerald in the blue water.

We decided to put up for the night at the picturesque old farmhouse of Reykjahlíð at the

far eastern end of the lake, but first I took a boat from another farm and was rowed across to one of the little islands. Here I landed for a short while, until driven away by the midges that enveloped me in clouds. The island was thickly overgrown with shrubs, small birches and wild flowers, doubtless providing a wonderful nesting place for the numerous wild ducks that belong here.

The people at Reykjahlíð farm were well accustomed to receiving travellers and the accommodation and food proved excellent.

The following day continued warm and sunny with a touch of north wind, so again I was very little troubled by the midges, although my veil was necessary at times when riding round the lake to the parsonage at Skútustadir, our next halting-place.

Before making for this point, however, I was anxious to ride over the sulphur mountains across the Námaskard pass, in order to see the weird mud cauldrons and craters in the volcanic region of Krafla, only a comparatively short distance away.

Almost immediately on leaving the lake with its green surroundings behind us, the scenery changed to a bare desert of sand mountains. Before reaching them, however, we had to cross



THE NÁMASKARD PASS



MÍVATN

some more lava flats, for lava is found all around Mývatn, especially near Reykjahlíð. The countless rocks and boulders with which the ground is strewn at this place were flung up by the last terrible eruption of Krafla two hundred years ago.

After picking our way over the lava, we struck up into the sulphur mountains. The track soon became lost in the sand, but here and there a rough cairn marked the route.

After we had climbed for some distance I looked back, and the contrast in scenery was most dramatic. Below, in the valley, only a comparatively short distance away, gleamed the silver waters of the lake, like a jewel set in a circle of emerald, so fertile the grass with which it was surrounded. Then I turned the other way, and I could see nothing but sand to right, to left, and in front of me, for the high mountain ridge through which cuts the Námaskard pass is composed entirely of sand, and is of course utterly void of any trace of vegetation. The air smelt strongly of sulphur, for these hills are all volcanic, and here and there we passed red and yellow patches of mineral deposit, around which the ground was frequently hot and steaming. The strong sunlight was so dazzling that one might have been crossing an Eastern desert !

Before long, we reached the top of the pass, and I looked over one of the weirdest and most impressive scenes I ever remember. Below, stretching away as far as eye could see, was a wild unbroken sea of lava, terminating to the left in a distant ridge of blue hills on the horizon. Between the ridge of hills on which I was standing and the vast desert beyond there was a flat surface of baked sand, seamed and cracked in places and leading in the centre to a series of solfataras—small craters out of which puffed great clouds of steam.

Having walked our ponies from the top of the pass down to the level, we were unable to take them any further, the ground ahead being unsafe, and very hot in places.

In order to reach the craters it was therefore necessary to go on foot. Thorstein went first, carefully testing each footstep as he went, for fear of a weak spot. He told me to follow him very exactly. This, needless to say, I was careful to do, for I had no wish to disappear suddenly through the thin crust over which we were walking! The ground was in a constant state of tremor and was punctured with cracks out of which issued thin coils of steam. It is said that another eruption around Krafla may be expected at any time; and, judging by the boiling ferment



ACTIVE CRATERS AT NÁMASKARD

which I could feel seething under the trembling crust over which we were cautiously walking, I should imagine the time will not be long ahead !

After peeping at the boiling grey mixture in one of the smaller craters, or mud cauldrons as they are sometimes called, we crept as near as we dared to the big central one, where we were almost choked by evil smelling sulphur fumes. Nevertheless I managed to get some mental notes for a sketch, and to take a few photographs. As I peered, awed and fascinated, into the black and steaming depths of this great cauldron, it suddenly threw up some boiling fragments of mud and lava, and started to spurt and sizzle in such an alarming manner that I thought it best to beat a hasty retreat. I began to feel that at any moment the sandy crust covering this tremendous underground furnace might cave in, and as I hurried back to where we had left the ponies I stepped very gingerly over the cracked ground, hoping it would not crack open altogether and swallow me up !

What with the heat from the sun radiating off the sand, and the heat from the boiling craters, it was quite a relief to ascend the pass once more and to meet the cool breeze at the top.

Before returning to Mývatn, I turned for a last look at the awe-inspiring scene behind me, and I

no longer wondered that this mighty stretch of lava which begins near here, and stretches for one thousand uninhabited square miles to the northern point of Vatna Jökull in the south, is called the Ódádahraun or the "Lava of Evil Deed."

There is something extremely sinister about it and many of the countryfolk believe it to be haunted by malicious spirits. The following translation of an old Icelandic riding song expresses a traveller's feelings while crossing part of this strange country :

" Ride we and ride we, dash across the wide sand ;
Low sinks the sun, now west by Arnarfell,
Strange things uncanny out about the wild lands,
Haunt the desert ice-hills ; ride we swift and well.
On with you, ponies, keeping up the speed,
Nothing evil overtakes the fast-running steed." *

Away to the south across the "Lava of Evil Deed," in a weird valley of craters, lies the great volcano Askja, the seat of many terrible eruptions and whose crater is the largest in the world, being thirteen miles broad.)

About twenty years ago three young German scientists decided to make an expedition to this place. Close by is a small lake of steaming water on whose sandy shore it is possible to pitch tents.

* "Icelandic Pictures."

Their intention was to spend a week, making observations.

Before starting they were warned not to camp there, for the place was so uncanny that the few people who had ventured as far were unable to stop for more than a few hours. The young men laughingly explained that they were hard-headed students, not given to morbid imaginings, and gaily rode on their way.

On arriving at their destination, they pitched their tents by the lakeside, sending away their guide and ponies for a week, for they had sufficient provisions to last that time. Two of the men unpacked their little collapsible boat and went on the lake to make observations, while the third, a geologist, got busy on the shore chipping at some rock. Absorbed in his work, it was some little time before he glanced round to look at his companions. To his amazement the lake was empty—the boat and its occupants had completely vanished! In vain he shouted to them. Not a sound! They had disappeared from off the face of the earth.

Night came on, and he realized with horror that he was alone, and *would* be alone for a whole long week, till the guide and ponies returned for him. Before then it would be impossible to leave this terrible place!

Hard-headed, unimaginative man as he was, the uncanny atmosphere began to tell on him. He fancied he was being watched on all sides. He had never believed in such things as evil spirits, or malignant elemental forces, but somehow their existence did not seem at all incredible in these surroundings. Then he would laugh at himself for a fool for entertaining such thoughts, but all the time his nerves were becoming more and more on edge.

At the end of the week the guide returned with the ponies. Instead of the three men he had left, he found one man only, and that one, for the time being, raving mad !

The others have never been heard of since. An expedition was sent to the spot to drag the lake, but not a trace of the missing men, nor of the boat, was ever found. Doubtless there is a perfectly natural explanation of some sort, but the story is an uncanny one.

I was told that, not long ago, another young geologist also visited the same district near Askja, declaring before he left that *he*, at any rate, should not be afraid to stop there. But after a few hours he was forced to leave. He said he simply could not stand it, and had no explanation to offer.

A couple of days' riding from Námaskard would have brought me there myself and, had I had

time, I must confess that I should have been intensely interested to see this weird and terrible place. But a tent, provisions and fodder for the ponies would have been necessary, my time in Iceland was drawing to a close, and I possibly should not have reached Akureyri in time to catch my boat, so I had to give up the idea.

I stayed for a few minutes longer looking at the weird panorama all around. It has been compared, with its numerous craters and strange lava formations, to a fairly good representation of the moon, as seen through a powerful telescope.

Finally, I turned once more towards Mývatn, and an hour's ride brought me back to the green fertile surroundings of the lake.

■

CHAPTER XII

FAREWELL TO ICELAND

MY time in Iceland, alas, was drawing to a close. A couple of days more and I should be back in Akureyri, and boarding the steamer for home !

As we rested the ponies at the cool lakeside on our return from Námaskard, I sadly realized that all the weird beauty and romantic interest of this wonderful land would soon be a memory only.

Later in the afternoon, we skirted the deep blue waters of the lake to the parsonage of Skútustadir, which stands at the extreme southern point.

The ride was a dream of loveliness, in striking contrast to the bare desert of sand and lava through which we had so lately come. The rocks and boulders with which the ground on our left was strewn were covered with lichen, and bright green moss grew in the hollows. In places, the shore of the lake was covered with luxuriant grass, and the surrounding hills took on every

hue of delicate violet, blue and pink ; while, behind, gleaming rose colour against the blue sky were the sulphur mountains we had crossed that morning.

The solitude was intense, and there was no sign of life except for the wild birds who, from time to time, whirled and dipped over my head, uttering their eerie cries. The plaintive, long-drawn whistle of the curlew still rings in my ears on occasions, calling me back to Iceland.

We reached Skútustadir that evening just in time to escape a thick blanket of heavy mist that enveloped the lake and its surroundings, and would have made riding very difficult, it being almost impossible to see more than a hand space in front.

The pastor was away, but his kindly wife made me very welcome for the night. She understood no English, but I was able to say one or two halting words to her with the aid of my note-book, and the few phrases of Icelandic which by now I had acquired.

The next morning, after a delicious meal of fresh salmon-trout from the lake, and a large bowl of skyr and cream, we started on our journey back towards Akureyri. Fortunately the fog had lifted. The track soon wound away up into the hills, and I turned for a last look at the calm

waters of Mývatn with its beautiful reflections, and its background of red and yellow sulphur mountains.

After crossing a stretch of wild moorland, with much dense scrub and quantities of blaeberrries, we followed a different route back to Ingalstadi, dropping north into another valley, where Thorstein was anxious for me to visit Laugaskóli, a college for young men and women.

I was kindly received here by the headmaster's wife. She spoke excellent English and, while giving me coffee and cakes, told me the remarkable history of this college. It was started in 1923 by her husband, Arnór Sigurjónsson, a young farmer of thirty-six. Its foundation had been his dream ever since he was a youth of eighteen. For years he worked for it, collecting money from all the farmers in the surrounding district. At last, to his joy, the building sum was raised, half the amount required being paid by the State, and a loan granted from the bank at Reykjavík. The result is a splendid stone building, with central heating laid on from the hot springs in the vicinity, which are also utilized to provide water for an indoor swimming-bath, and a small artificial lake outside the house. The latter is used as a skating rink in winter. In addition to the swimming-bath, the house contains every modern conveni-



LAUGASKÓLI

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INGJALDSSTADIR

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ence, and was indeed a surprising sight to meet, in that lonely valley !

My hostess told me that they were able to take in eighty pupils—30 young women and 50 young men—their ages ranging from seventeen to thirty years.

She explained that, in the villages, the children attend school from the ages of seven to fourteen, the schools being open from seven to nine months in the year. Away up country, however, it is different. The children are only able to attend a school for two months each winter, and then only from the ages of ten to fourteen. But curiously enough it is found that they know quite as much as the village children, for they are encouraged to read and study at home during the long winter days. In the cases where there is no school of any kind near, the parents either give instruction themselves or employ a teacher to stay in the house for a short time each year.

A love of reading and a thirst for knowledge characterizes most Icelanders, especially the farmer class, and they teach their children early to value books. The sagas are to be found in every little home, and it is chiefly through these famous stories that the people are familiar with the stirring history of their country.

Those farmers, who can afford it, often com-

plete the education of their sons and daughters by sending them at the age of seventeen or eighteen and sometimes a good deal older to one of the five colleges for young people that have been started in Iceland during the last twenty-five years, and of which Laugaskóli is one of the most recent.

The pupils stay at these schools for a period covering two years, with a session of six months during the winter and spring. The fees vary from between £20 and £25 a session. In addition to attending classes on all ordinary subjects, including foreign languages, the young men learn carpentry and study agriculture, and the girls are taught domestic economy. I was told that Laugaskóli differs from the other five schools, in the respect that the pupils are able to specialize in one given subject, should they so wish.

I was then led upstairs to the dormitories and classrooms. Proudly pointing to the beds, chairs, desks and tables, etc., the headmaster's wife explained that these had all been made by the pupils themselves. "Next winter they are to make their wardrobes," she added.

We next visited the library, where there was an excellent collection of books, including some English classics.

Surely there is no country in the world where

the peasantry have such a passion for books as in Iceland! At Húsavík, the little herring station up on the coast, which, although thirty miles distant, is yet the nearest village to this district, there exists a wonderful library. It was started in 1890 by a farmer, Benidik Jónsson. This remarkable man is responsible for collecting four to five thousand volumes. He is now eighty years of age and still takes the keenest interest in the library. The English books include Shakespeare, works by Kipling, Scott and Sir Oliver Lodge, novels by Mrs. Humphry Ward, and some books from the Fabian Society on Socialism and the Labour question.

In the autumn, the farmers from the remote outlying valleys ride into Húsavík to buy their store of provisions for the winter, and at the same time they call at the library and collect a large parcel of books for enjoyment during the long dark evenings. They return these books when they again travel into Húsavík in the early summer, for the purpose of selling their sheep's wool.

After leaving the school library, I was shown the large swimming-bath of warm water. My kind friend lent me a bathing costume and I enjoyed a swim, a pleasure I had not expected in Iceland!

Later, I asked if I might be introduced to her husband.

"Yes," she replied, "but he is rather shy, because he cannot speak much English. He is now haymaking. We are farmers, you see, as well as teachers. It is our ambition to try and encourage a love of the land and of farming in our pupils, as well as a love of learning."

On our reaching the hay-field, a tall, fine-looking man, with the face of a dreamer and a poet, came to meet us, carrying his pitchfork over his shoulder. His father is, as a matter of fact, a literary man of no mean standing, and I was told that these northern valleys number more poets among their farmers than any other part of the country.

Before leaving I took a photograph of Arnór and his wife standing by the lake, and, in the background, the school which is their pride!

Another couple of hours' riding over the hills, and we dropped down to Ingalstadi once more, where I had arranged to spend the night. The ponies were in splendid fettle, galloping madly whenever they got a chance. No doubt they realized they were homeward bound!

The following morning, July 27th, although clouds were gathering over the hills, the weather was still fine, and, mounting my pony, I started



THE END OF THE JOURNEY

off regretfully for the last day's ride, my long journey around Iceland nearly at an end !

Back past foaming Godafoss, through the lovely Ljósavatn valley with its blue lake, past the forest of silver birch trees, and then, after a long climb up into the hills, a turn of the track brought me in sight of the still waters of Eyjafjörður far below, with the little town of Akureyri on its shores, and, towering up behind, range upon range of snow capped mountains and glaciers.

I turned for a last look at the vast expanse of green hills and valleys behind me, and up at the glittering peaks ahead, and then and there I made my farewell to Iceland—wonderful Land of Frost and Fire, trackless deserts and wild mountain passes.

But, surely, she has cast her spell over me, as she invariably does over all wanderers who love the unbroken solitude of Nature, her vast open spaces, and the lure of the Unknown—all this and more I found in Iceland, and I trust that, in these pages, I have been able to convey to my readers something, at least, of the indefinable air of mystery and romance that I myself felt so keenly while passing through the heart of the Country.

AMERICA TO ICELAND *

We come, the children of thy Vinland
The youngest of the world's high peers,
O land of steel, and song, and saga,
To greet thy glorious thousand years !

Across the sea the son of Erik
Dared with his venturous dragon's prow ;
From shores where Thorfinn set thy banner,
Their latest children seek thee now.

Hail, mother-land of skalds and heroes,
By love of freedom hither hailed,
Fire in their hearts as in thy mountains,
And strength like thine to shake the world !

When war and ravage wrecked the nations,
The bird of song made thee her home ;
The ancient gods, the ancient glory,
Still dwelt within thy shores of foam.

* This fine poem by the American poet, Bayard Taylor, was written to commemorate the Millennial Anniversary, in 1874, of the first settlement of Iceland, when Ingólf Arnarson arrived in the country.

Here, as a fount may keep its virtue
While all the rivers turbid run,
The manly growth of deed and daring
Was thine beneath a scantier sun.

Set far apart, neglected, exiled,
Thy children wrote their runes of pride,
With power that brings, in this thy triumph,
The conquering nations to thy side.

What though thy native harps be silent,
The chord they struck shall ours prolong :
We claim thee kindred, call thee mother,
O land of saga, steel, and song.

BAYARD TAYLOR

APPENDIX

SOME FACTS IN THE HISTORY OF ICELAND

A.D.

- 871 The Norwegian chieftains, Ingólfur and Hjörleifur, land in Iceland for permanent settling.
- 872 Hjörleifur killed by his Irish slaves. Ingólfur avenges him.
- 874 High seat pillars of Ingólfur found drifted ashore at Reykjavík, where he finally settles.
- 878 Skallagrímur comes to Iceland, settles at Borg.
- 904 His son, Egill Skallagrímsson, the great poet and Viking, b.
- 924 Egill Skallagrímsson and his brother Thórólfur visit King Athelstan of England.
- 930 The Althing (the Icelandic parliament) established at Thingvellir and the Icelandic Commonwealth organized.
- 986 Eiríkur the Red (one of the settlers of Iceland) colonizes Greenland.
- 995 The noble hero, Gunnar of Hlíðarendi, slain.
- 996 Grettir, the outlaw, b.
- 999 Gizur the White and Hjalti Skeggjason go to Norway.
- 1000 They return to Iceland and at Althing succeed in introducing the Christian Faith. All Icelanders baptized.

A.D.

- Leifur, son of Eiríkur the Red, discovers "Wine-land the Good," alias America.
- 1004 The Fifth Court or Supreme Court established.
- 1006 Duels abolished. Bishop Ísleifur, son of Gizur the White, b.
- 1007 Thorfinnur Karlsefni attempts to colonize America.
- 1011 Thorfinnur Karlsefni returns from America.
 Burning at Bergthórshvoll; the wise chieftain Njáll, his wife Bergthóra, and their three sons perish in the fire.
- 1012 Battle at the Althing, many of the Burners killed in revenge for Njáll and his family.
- 1014 Hallfredur, an Icelander, the skáld of King Ólafur Tryggvason, d.
 Battle of Clontarf or Brian's battle, where many Icelanders were engaged.
- 1024 St. Ólafur, King of Norway, makes an unsuccessful attempt to gain possession of Iceland.
- 1031 Snorri godi (chieftain) d. and Grettir, the outlaw, killed, these two being the last notable personages of the saga period or heroic era.
- 1056 Ísleifur Gizurarson, son of Gizur the White, first native consecrated as Bishop of Iceland by order of the Pope.
- 1067 Ari Fródi, the historian, b.
- 1080 Bishop Ísleifur Gizurarson d.
- 1082 Bishop Ísleifur succeeded by his son Gizur, of whom "it can be truthfully said that he was both king and bishop in the island until his death" (1118).

A.D.

- 1096 System of tithes introduced by Bishop Gizur and others.
- 1117 Laws committed to writing. Beginning of literary period.
- 1148 Death of Ari Fródi, "the father" of Icelandic history writing.
- 1178 The greatest Icelandic historian, Snorri Sturluson, b.
- 1197 Jón Loptsson, the great chieftain and peace-maker, d.
- 1200 Civil war of the Sturlunga period (1200-1264) begins.
- 1220 Snorri Sturluson persuades Hákon, King of Norway, and Duke Skúli to abandon their plan of a military expedition to Iceland.
- 1238 Battle of Örygsstaðir, where many of the Sturlunga family were killed.
- 1241 Snorri Sturluson treacherously assassinated by order of King Hákon of Norway (Sept. 22).
- 1244 Sea-battle of Húnaþing (June 25).
- 1258 Death of Thórdur Kakali, a great chieftain of the Sturlunga family.
Gizur Thorvaldsson illegally created earl or governor of Iceland by the King of Norway.
- 1262 End of the Commonwealth, the Icelanders become the subjects of the King of Norway.
- 1268 Gizur Thorvaldsson d.
- 1271-3 The Járnsida code of law adopted.
- 1281 Jónsbók, a new code of law, adopted.
- 1284 Sturla Thordarson, the historian, d.
- 1286 The Icelanders refuse conscription.

A.D.

- 1302 The King of Norway forbids every one except Norwegian merchants to trade with Iceland. The Icelanders protest against having Norwegian "lawmen."
- 1306 The Althing decides that the people shall resist the King's unjust demands.
- 1380 Iceland with Norway comes under Danish rule.
- 1402 Black Death.
- 1433 The Swede, Jón Gerreksson, probably the most vicious of all the worthless foreign bishops Iceland had in those days, captured by two native chieftains, tied in a sack and drowned in the river Brúará near Skálholt.
- 1484 Jón Arason, b.
- 1524 Jón Arason becomes bishop of the northern diocese of Iceland.
- 1534 Bishop Jón Arason puts up a printing press.
- 1540 Oddur Gottskálksson publishes the New Testament in Icelandic.
- 1548 Bishop Jón Arason takes decisive steps to defend the Catholic religion and the freedom of the country. Civil war.
- 1550 Overthrow of the Catholic party. Bishop Jón Arason and his sons, Björn and Ari, beheaded at Skálholt (Nov. 7).
- 1584 The Lutheran bishop, Gudbrandur Thorláksson, publishes the first Bible in Iceland.
- 1602 Danish Trade Monopoly introduced.
- 1614 Hallgrímur Pjetursson, the great poet, author of the Passion Hymns, b.
- 1627 Algerian pirates make raids on the coasts of Iceland.

A.D.

- 1662 Absolutism established in Iceland. Oath of allegiance sworn to King Frederick III.
- 1674 Hallgrímur Pjetursson d.
- 1690 Burning for witchcraft abolished by law.
- 1703 Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín take census.
- 1752 Skúli Magnússon causes different factories to be built at Reykjavík.
- 1773 First Icelandic periodical published (a monthly).
- 1783 Volcanic eruption of Laki, the most terrible and destructive one in the history of Iceland.
- 1787 Trade Monopoly abolished.
- 1794 Skúli Magnússon d.
- 1798 The Althing held for the last time at Thingvellir, where it had met since A.D. 930.
- 1809 The Danish adventurer Jørgen Jørgensen, aided by some English merchants, makes himself "king" of Iceland. Rules for six weeks, and at the end of that time is dethroned by an English R.N. captain and brought to England.
- 1811 Jón Sigurdsson, the eminent statesman, scholar and patriot, b. (June 17).
- 1843 Restoration of Althing in Reykjavík.
- 1848 First weekly paper issued ("The Thjóðólfur").
- 1854 Free Trade adopted.
- 1874 Millennial anniversary of the first settlement of Iceland celebrated. King Christian IX visits Iceland. Iceland gets its first Constitution.
- 1879 Death of Jón Sigurdsson.
- 1885 The National Bank of Iceland established by law on Sept. 18th. Starts business July 1st, 1886.

A.D.

- 1896 First daily paper issued ("The Dagskrá").
1902 The Bank of Iceland established by law. Starts
business 1904.
1904 Iceland gets Home Rule.
1906 Telegraphic cable laid between Iceland and
Europe.
1911 University founded in Reykjavík (June 17).
1914 Icelandic Steamship Co. Ltd. established (Jan.
17).
1915 Iceland gets a local flag.
1918 The Iceland Marine-Insurance Co. Ltd. estab-
lished.
1918 Iceland becomes a sovereign kingdom in union
with Denmark (Dec. 1).
1930 Millennial anniversary of the foundation of the
Althing at Thingvellir (June 26).

STEFÁN STEFÁNSSON
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SOME HINTS FOR THE TRAVELLER

The Icelandic Steamship Company has a good service for the transport of passengers and goods between Iceland, ~~Great~~ Britain, Norway and Denmark. There are two other steamship companies, a Norwegian and a Danish, also serving Iceland regularly.

The sailings from Leith to Reykjavík are fairly frequent during the summer months. The boats are small but comfortable, and the voyage takes from three to four days.

Scandinavian coinage is employed in Iceland, 21 Icelandic Krónur being equivalent to about £1 sterling.

There are two banks in Reykjavík and one in Akureyri.

For all long journeys across country on horseback, it is essential that the traveller should provide himself with a sou'wester and a complete set of oilskins (trousers and coat) to wear over his riding clothes when necessary. He must also have rubber riding boots, and thick woollen stockings.

In certain places in Iceland, where it is necessary to camp out, the traveller would be wise to bring his own tent, waterproof ground sheet and sleeping bag.

Information with regard to the various routes for inland journeys, the price of ponies, guides, etc., may be obtained from the following booklets, sold in Reykjavík :

"Iceland," by Stefán Stefánsson, Reykjavík.

"Where the Sun Shines at Midnight," Reykjavík, 1928.

There are two excellent guides and travel agents in Reykjavík: Helgi Zoëga and Stefán Stefánsson. They both are full of information about Iceland, and are always ready to help and advise foreigners.

PRONUNCIATION OF ICELANDIC NAMES

There are two letters peculiar to Icelandic :

Þ hard *th* as in *think*. Þingvellir pronounced *Thingvetlir*.

ð soft *th* as in *father*. Buðir pronounced *Boothir*.

The first parts of these two names are identical both in pronunciation and etymology with the English words *thing* and *booth*. In the text of this book no use has been made of these Icelandic letters. They are represented, in the case of the hard *th* Þ, by the English equivalent *th* as in Thingvellir, and in the case of the soft *th* ð by an ordinary *d*: e.g., Búdir pronounced *Boothir*; Eyjafjörður pronounced *Eiyafyurthur*.

In the pronunciation of Icelandic names it should be remembered that the stress generally comes on the first syllable; the written accent indicates a long vowel, not the stress.

á pronounced like *ow* in *how*. Laxá pronounced *Lax-ow*.
æ pronounced like *ai* in *aisle*. Snæfell pronounced *Snai-fell*.

au pronounced like *œi* in French *œil*. Haukadalur pronounced *Hœika-dalur*.

ei or ey pronounced like *ei* in *rein*. Reykjavík pronounced *Reik-ya-veek*.

fi pronounced like *bl* in *tabloid*. Krafla pronounced *Krabla*.

fn pronounced like bn in *abnegation*. Hafnarfjörður pronounced *Habnar-fyurthur*.

hv pronounced like kw in *Pickwick*. Hvítá pronounced *Kweet-ow*; Uxahver pronounced *Ooxa-kwer*.

í pronounced like ee in *heel*. Ísland pronounced *Ees-land*.

j pronounced like y in *yes*. Jökull pronounced *Yu-kull*.

ll pronounced like tl in *Scotland*. Thingvellir pronounced *Thing-vetlir*.

ng pronounced like ng in *finger* (not as in *singer*). Nord-tunga pronounced *Northtoong-ga*.

ö pronounced like u in *urn*. Öxará pronounced *U-xar-ow*.

ú pronounced like oo in *boot*. Búdir pronounced *Boothir*.

ý pronounced like ee in *heel*. Mývatn pronounced *Mee-vatn*.

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